

**Clothing Middle-Class Women:  
Dress, Gender and Identity in Mid-Victorian England  
*c.* 1851-1875**

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in the History Department  
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### **Declaration of Authorship**

I, Ya-Lei Yen, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## **Abstract**

This thesis analyses the role played by clothes within the socio-cultural context of middle-class women's lives in mid-Victorian England, *c.* 1851-75. By drawing on a broad range of sources, including a survey of prescriptive literature and women's magazines, novels, letters, diaries, account books, clothing bills, the records of a tailor and a dressmaker, cartoons, fashion plates, photographs, paintings, advertisements, inventories and surviving objects, it also explores the material culture of dress history.

After the historiographical introduction, Chapter One argues that to be respectable, mid-Victorian middle-class women had to dress according to social morals and etiquette. Chapter Two explores how middle-class women's magazines used language to construct the world of fashion, how they portrayed feminine beauty, how women readers reacted to such portrayals of their clothes, and what surviving dresses reveal about the values of mid-Victorian women. Chapter Three reveals the way middle-class women used their personal photographs to communicate with their relatives, friends and lovers, and explores how photographs represent the ideology of middle-class womanhood, how middle-class women used dress to represent their identity, and what the difference was between fashion in photographs, magazines and reality. Chapter Four argues that for middle-class women, home sewing was not only a feminine virtue and duty, but also a fashionable activity and a means of expression, and examines how advertisers created the link between middle-class women and the sewing machine, as well as critics' views on machine sewing. Chapter Five reveals that through symbolic dress consumption, middle-class women constructed and maintained their gender, as well as personal and social identities. Chapter Six analyses the relationship between sports, including bathing, swimming, horse riding, hunting, shooting, archery, croquet, and skating, sportswear and gender. Overall, this thesis shows how clothes were used to construct the respectability of mid-Victorian middle-class Englishwomen.

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## List of Abbreviations

B&I	British and Irish Women's Letter and Diaries
BCM	Blaise Castle House Museum, Bristol
BL	British Library
BM	Bowes Museum, Durham
<i>Cassell's</i>	<i>Cassell's Household Guide</i>
<i>CC</i>	<i>The Child's Companion</i>
<i>CF</i>	<i>The Children's Friend</i>
CM	Chertsey Museum
<i>EDM</i>	<i>The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine</i>
FM	Fashion Museum, Bath
GA	Gloucester Archives
GD	Gale Digital Databases
<i>ILN</i>	<i>The Illustrated London News</i>
<i>JB</i>	<i>John Bull</i>
<i>Judy</i>	<i>Judy or the London Serio-Comic Journal</i>
<i>LC</i>	<i>The Ladies' Companion and Monthly Magazine</i>
<i>LCF</i>	<i>The Ladies' Cabinet of Fashion, Music, and Romance</i>
<i>LF</i>	<i>Le Follet Courrier des Salons, Journal des Modes</i>
<i>LN</i>	<i>The Lady's Newspaper</i>
<i>LT</i>	<i>The Ladies' Treasury</i>
MCG	Manchester City Galleries
ML	Museum of London
<i>Myra's</i>	<i>Myra's Journal of Dress and Fashion</i>
NA	National Archives, Kew
<i>NMBA</i>	<i>The New Monthly Belle Assemblée</i>
<i>OED</i>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
<i>ODNB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
PDVA	The Prints and Drawings study room, Victoria and Albert Museum
<i>Punch</i>	<i>Punch or the London Charivari</i>
<i>Queen</i>	<i>The Queen; An Illustrated Journal and Review</i>
RAMM	Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter
RH	Rougemont House, Exeter
SHC	Surry History Centre
V&A	Victoria and Albert Museum
VAO	Victoria and Albert Museum Online Photograph Collection
WAG	Walker Art Gallery, National Museums Liverpool
<i>WF</i>	<i>The World of Fashion</i>
WM	Worthing Museum

## List of Illustrations

The following institutions have kindly granted permission to reproduce images in this thesis: Blaise Castle House Museum, Bristol; Bowes Museum, Durham; Chertsey Museum, Surrey; Fashion Museum, Bath; Manchester City Galleries; Museum of London; Rougemont House, Exeter; Tate Gallery; Victoria and Albert Museum; Walker Art Gallery, National Museums Liverpool; and Worthing Museum.

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## Glossary

Definitions adapted from the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and C. W. and P. E. Cunningham, *A Dictionary of English Costume 900-1900* (1965).

Alpaca	A springy shiny textile made of Alpaca wool and silk.
<i>Appliqué</i>	Ornamental needlework in which small decorative pieces of fabric are sewn or stuck on to a fabric or garment to form a pattern or trim.
<i>Barège</i>	A semi-transparent textile of silk and wool with open mesh.
<i>Basque</i>	An extension of the bodice below the waist.
Brocade	A textile fabric woven with a pattern of raised figures originally in gold or silver, or later, any kind of cloth richly wrought or flowered with a raised pattern.
Bustle	A device for thrusting out the skirt at the back of the waist.
Calico	Originally of Indian cotton; later, cotton cloth.
<i>Cantinière</i>	A military style of dress.
Cape	A short shoulder-cloak.
<i>Caraco</i>	The bodice of a day dress made to resemble a jacket.
Cashmere	A fine soft woollen fabric originally made of the wool of a Tibetan goat; European imitations in sheep's wool.
Cheviot	A rough-finished fabric from strong coarse wool, well milled.
Cloak	A loose outer garment of varying length falling from the neck over the shoulders.
Cloth	A high-quality, extra-wide wool fabric shrunk and sheared after weaving to give an even, fray-resistant texture.
<i>Corsage</i>	The bodice of a woman's dress.
Corset	An undergarment with whalebone or steel ribs embracing the chest and compressing the natural level of the waist.
Crape/Crepe	A transparent crimped silk gauze, originally black and as such used for mourning, for which purpose and colour the spelling 'Crape' remained in use. The later spelling 'Crepe' denoted a similar material in the nineteenth century, but of various colours and worn for general use.
Crinoline	In 1856, the 'Artificial Crinoline' appeared in whalebone, which was then replaced by spring steel. The shape of hoops varied: between 1857 and 1859 it was domed, and then pyramidal. By 1862, the size began to diminish, and in 1866, the front became flat and the back projected outwards.
Day dress	A dress worn in the daytime.
<i>Décolletage</i>	A dress with a low neckline.
Doeskin	A soft fine West of England cloth, with the warp set very close so that the weave lines are invisible and the surface smooth and level.
Elastic	The first patent for applying India rubber to thread to form 'elastic' material was taken out by Hancock in 1820.
Felt	A solid composition of wool fibres and fur hairs, joined without weaving but by matting together by heat, moisture and pressure. A material much used for making hats.
<i>Fichu</i>	A triangular piece of some light fabric.
Flannel	Originally a Welsh-made woollen material. Made of woollen yarn slightly twisted, with an open texture and made of plain or twill weave.

Foulard	A soft, light washing silk, twilled.
Gabrielle	A sleeve made up of a series of puffs from shoulder to wrist,
Sleeves	between 1859 and 1869.
Gauze	Made of cotton in many varieties.
Gingham	A stout chequered cloth, originally of linen and later of cotton.
<i>Glacé</i>	A plain taffeta with a peculiar lustrous surface.
Grenadine	An open silk or silk and wool gauze, with the mesh more open than <i>barège</i> . Many varieties were both plain and figured, and there was also an all-wool Grenadine. Often used for shawls.
Grosgrain	A stout silk of rich quality showing a cord, less perceptible than in poplin, running from selvedge to selvedge.
Kid	The skin of a young goat.
Knickerbockers	A loose form of breeches worn by men.
<i>La Mode</i>	Fashion.
Lawn	A very fine semi-transparent linen cloth.
Linen	A woven textile made of flax.
Mantilla	A small cape or mantle.
Mantle	A cloak-like outer garment.
Mantua-maker	Originally a person who made mantuas, later used to refer to a dressmaker.
Merino	A thin woollen twilled cloth of the wool of the merino sheep.
Moiré	A heavy stout watered grosgrain.
Muslin	A fine cotton fabric with a downy nap on the surface.
Paletot	A 3/4 length cloak hanging in stiff pleats from the shoulders and with a short stiff cape and armholes guarded with flaps. Some were sleeveless.
<i>Pardessus</i>	An outdoor garment of half or 3/4 length, with sleeves and shaped into the waist.
<i>Passementerie</i>	A French term covering a wide rang of trimmings, such as tassels, braid, cord, gimp, tufts, rosettes and fringing used to decorate dresses.
Pelisse	An outdoor garment with variations in shape and materials.
Polonaise	A dress with an overskirt bunched up behind and completely uncovering the underskirt, which was usually ankle-length or sometimes trained, or the draped skirt of a robe or gown which revealed a petticoat or underskirt. The style was fashionable in the 1770s, and again in the 1860s and 1870s.
Revers	A lapel.
Sacque	A loose-fitting coat.
Satin	A silk twilled textile given a smooth glossy surface by the application of heat, with a dull backing.
Serge	A loosely woven twilled flannel, with worsted warp of worsted and woollen weft.
Swiss belt	A waistband broadening at the front to a lozenge shape, pointed above and below. In the 1860s, the Swiss belt appeared in a bodice form, with shoulder straps added to a broad waistband with falling sash ends at the back.
<i>Tablier</i> tunic	An overskirt triangular in shape, with one corner descending nearly to the hem of the skirt in front, and the others fastened under the <i>basque</i> of the jacket bodice.
Taffeta	Originally a plain glossy silk textile, and later a thin glossy silk with

	a wavy lustre.
Tarlatan	A thin gauze-like muslin much stiffened.
Tulle	A fine silk bobbin-net.
Tweed	A woollen cloth originating in Scotland.
Velvet	A silk fabric with a short, dense pile.
<i>Visite</i>	A loose outdoor garment, ranging from a pelerine or mantle to a cloak.
Waistcoat	In the eighteenth century, woman's waistcoats were an intimate garment, worn between the undergarment and the outer garment. By the early 1850s, though, the waistcoat was a fashionable outer garment for women.
Waterproof	The use of India rubber solution applied to a textile was patented by Charles Mackintosh in 1823. The cloth called waterproof is generally lined with calico or figured cotton; these materials are well imbued and stiffened with gum and firmly sewn together. The smell of the gum is not only unpleasant quality in this kind of cloth for on approaching the fire the lining shrinks.
Zouave jacket	A jacket of silk, velvet or cloth, without a black seam and with the front borders rounded off and fastened at the neck only. Many variations, but all retaining the main features. Fashionable from 1859 to 1870.

## Introduction

In 1850, the English novelist Geraldine Endors Jewsbury (1812-80) wrote to her friend Mrs Jane Baillie Welsh Carlyle (1801-66):

the chief news I have to tell you is about myself, that I have found a good mantua-maker, and that she has made me a beautiful dress, which fits like one of yours. Also, I have been to see the fashions to-day, and bought myself a cloak which I think is a very good speculation. Is there not a certain satisfaction in the heart of every woman when she gets a successful bonnet, or cloak, or gown? I am almost ashamed of myself for being so pleased with this cloak - which, after all, is only of coarse brown cloth -- but it has a hood, and hangs in the most beautiful folds.<sup>1</sup>

Two years later, Geraldine sent Jane another letter:

I want to know how your parties went off at Lady --'s, and what you wore, and how you looked, &c.... I set up a very beautiful dress the other day ... It is one of those rich brocaded silks that almost stand on end, a beautiful pink colour, and I got it at --'s for 3*l.* 5*s.*, and there was no earthly reason that I could see why it should not have been charged its original price, nine guineas; but they said it was because broad stripes were not fashionable. Ah! I suppose it is only angels that improve with eternity; everything else is only good when new!<sup>2</sup>

The first letter shows the excitement of Geraldine, a middle-class Victorian woman, on receiving a 'beautiful' mantua-made dress. She is clearly influenced by the taste of her friend, and was very pleased with her new ready-made brown cloak. In the second letter, we see that Geraldine seems to have been an economically-minded woman: her cloak was made of 'coarse' brown cloth, and she bought a discounted brocade rather than a fashionable one. In addition to this, we also see how curious Geraldine was to know what Jane had worn at Lady --'s party and how she looked, going on to give Jane her own news, namely that she had acquired a rich brocade dress for herself.

These two letters were intimate conversations between two friends, and as such provide us with some insights into the daily lives of middle-class Victorian women. Through their dialogue, it is clear that dress played an important role in their identity. Women also tended to discuss what they wore in a very specific way, notably with reference to questions of taste and with a view to making sure that they were dressed properly for the community in which they lived. In short, these letters raise the question

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<sup>1</sup> A. E. Ireland (ed.), *Selection from the Letters of Geraldine Endors Jewsbury to Jane Welsh Carlyle* (1892), p. 376, British and Irish Women's Letters and Diaries (hereafter B&I):S4830-D104. All the books listed were published in London unless otherwise stated. Geraldine was the daughter of Manchester merchant Thomas Jewsbury (d. 1840), and never married, while Jane was the wife of the Scottish satirical writer Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881). They were intimate friends, and exchanged letters for nearly 25 years. Instead of 'lady', this thesis uses the word 'woman' to describe middle-class women.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 435, B&I:S4830-D125.

of what role was played by clothes in the lives of mid-Victorian English middle-class women, and how they were used to convey social meanings. This is the main focus of this thesis.

The mid-Victorian period between *c.* 1851 and 1875 was a period of unprecedented prosperity, and one which saw huge social and cultural change in Great Britain.<sup>3</sup> The Great Exhibition of 1851, the first international industrial exhibition in the world, showcased the grandest industrial accomplishments and technological advances. Industrialisation stimulated the growth of the middle classes, and the elaborate etiquette which governed their lives developed accordingly. Mechanisation powered the development of the textile and clothing industries, manufacturers started to mass-produce cheap ready-made clothing, and sewing machines changed the nature of women's work. In this period, the style of women's dress evolved from a broad silhouette to an hourglass shape, with wider skirts supported by multiple layers of petticoats, from a cage crinoline to a half-crinoline top swelling at the bustle and then narrowing at the bottom. The colours used in women's dresses became much brighter after the first aniline dye, mauve, was created in 1856. These changes altered the way in which middle-class women used dress to conform and construct ideas of gender, class, identity, morality and etiquette, as well as their ability to be fashionable on a limited clothing budget. In the final decades of the century, more middle-class women began to attend college, went out to work, became economically independent and enjoyed sexual autonomy, in stark contrast to the ideology of the 'Angel in the House' promoted in the mid-Victorian period.<sup>4</sup> It was therefore decided to limit this thesis to the period around 1875, before these changes took place.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the social meaning of dress through a wide range of previously unused historical sources. The earliest studies of dress were based on an object-based approach, mainly carried out by dress collectors and museum curators, and their works present a chronological and stylistic analysis rather than placing an emphasis on the social and cultural meanings of clothes.<sup>5</sup> From the late 1970s, different disciplines, such as gender and cultural studies, social and economic

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<sup>3</sup> C. Garwood, *Mid-Victorian Britain 1850-1889* (Oxford, 2011); K. T. Hoppen, *Mid-Victorian Generation 1856-1886* (1989); G. Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain 1851-1875* (1971).

<sup>4</sup> S. Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester, 1997), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> 'Hemline histories' that neglect considerations of context and meaning for studying clothes have been much criticised. C. Breward, *The Culture of Fashion: A New History of Fashionable Dress* (Manchester, 1995), p. 1. On 'hemline histories' of nineteenth-century dress, see C. W. Cunnington, *English Women's Clothing in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1990); *idem*, *The Handbook of English Costume in the Nineteenth Century* (1966), with Illustrations by P. Cunnington and C. Everitt. Originally, the former was published in 1937; the latter was published in 1959.

history, semiology and sociology have started to study dress within a broader social, cultural, economic and historical context. They have often studied dress through some particular documentary or visual sources, but overlooked actual dresses, which ‘provide unique insights into the historic and aesthetic development of fashion’.<sup>6</sup> To prevent reductive tendencies and pitfalls of a single approach, scholars have increasingly taken an interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary approach to dress studies especially since the conference of ‘Dress in History: Studies and Approaches’ in 1997.<sup>7</sup> Increasingly, dress is seen as ‘material culture’.<sup>8</sup> As dress historian Lou Taylor puts it, material culture uses “the consumption and interpretation of objects as means of examining ‘society’ and ‘culture’”.<sup>9</sup> The clothes culture of English middle-class women between c. 1851 and 1875, though, has not been examined in accordance with these methodological frameworks. This thesis aims to explore three key issues: how clothes and clothes practices reflected and constructed middle-class women’s gender, class and identity; what clothes can reveal about their experiences; and how clothes fashioned and maintained their femininity and gender relations. Importantly, there are significant differences in the way the social meaning of dress and femininity are constructed in historical sources. The material analysed here includes: textual evidence (prescriptive literature, women’s magazines, novels, letters, diaries, account books, clothing bills, inventories, the notebooks of a tailor and a dressmaker, and advertisements); visual evidence (cartoons, fashion plates, photographs and paintings) and physical evidence of surviving objects, with a view to providing a comprehensive study of dress within this 25-year period. As it will emerge, these documents and objects reveal the way clothes were linked to familiar ideas of Victorian middle-class morality and etiquette, and the feminine ideology that has long been associated with Victorian womanhood. But sources such as surviving dresses, photographs and inventories also show us how fashions were adapted, and clothes were used in everyday life, offering a fresh perspective on the meaning of middle-class women’s dress.

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<sup>6</sup> V. Steele, ‘A Museum of Fashion is More Than a Clothes-Bag’, *Fashion Theory*, 2:4(1998), 327-336(p. 327).

<sup>7</sup> On methodology, see *Fashion Theory*, 2:4(1998); *Costume*, 33(1999). For the discipline of history, *Consumption and the World of Goods* (1993), edited by John Brewer and Roy Porter is the groundbreaking study of the relationship between material objects, such as clothing and textile, and consumers across different levels of society in the early modern period.

<sup>8</sup> Christopher Breward argues that ‘clothing and fashion have finally become a vehicle for debates that now lie at the heart of visual and material culture studies’. C. Breward, ‘Cultures, Identities, Histories: Fashioning A Cultural Approach to Dress’, *Fashion Theory*, 2:4(1998), 301-313(p. 305). Also, for example, the dress and fashion historians Ariel Beaujot, Giorgio Riello and John Styles and the textile conservator Dinah Eastop who present themselves as material culture specialists.

<sup>9</sup> L. Taylor, *The Study of Dress History* (Manchester, 2002), p. 72.



The introductory chapter is divided into two sections. The first section considers historiography, covering three areas: material culture studies, historical studies of nineteenth century dress and accessories, and previous historical studies of the Victorian middle classes. The second section explains how the term middle class has been defined and used, the sources chosen and the research methodology, and provides an outline of the following chapters.

## HISTORIOGRAPHY

### Material Culture Studies

In the late 1970s, a new research model - material culture - emerged. The most notable methodologies for material culture at the time were formulated by the American art historians Edward McClung Fleming and Jules David Prown, who respectively provide a four-operation analysis (identification, evaluation, cultural analysis and interpretation) and a three-stage analysis (description, deduction and speculation) for perceiving and interpreting objects, culture patterns and values.<sup>10</sup> For them, object analysis (the cultural interpretation of objects) is regarded as a methodological approach to material culture. Alexandra Palmer, for example, adopts such object-based analysis to study *haute couture* dresses of English-Canadian women with a cultural interpretation of the production, retailing and consumption in Toronto of the 1950s.<sup>11</sup> The scholar of American folklife studies Bernard Herman, on the other hand, divides material culture into an 'object-centred' approach, focusing on the physical attributes of the object and an 'object-driven' approach, utilising 'the evidence of material culture (including documentary accounts of objects) to reconstruct and interpret contextual circumstance'. For him, the former helps to understand the materiality of things, mainly done by archaeologists, art historians and museum curators; the latter regards 'objects as evidence of other complex social relationships'.<sup>12</sup> Material culture, of course, does not simply mean only the examination of objects but it can also involve the exploration of ideas, texts or images. However, as this thesis demonstrates, without the detailed study of surviving objects, an important part of dress history will be missed, not to mention an

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<sup>10</sup> E. M. Fleming, 'Artifact Study: A Proposed Model', *Winterthur Portfolio*, 9(1974), 153-173; J. D. Prown, *Art as Evidence: Writings on Art and Material Culture* (2002); idem, 'Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method', *Winterthur Portfolio*, 17:1(1982), 1-19.

<sup>11</sup> A. Palmer, *Culture and Commerce: The Transatlantic Fashion Trade in the 1950s* (2001); idem, 'New Directions: Fashion History Studies and Research in North America and England', *Fashion Theory*, 1:3(1997), 297-312.

<sup>12</sup> B. Herman, *The Stolen House* (1992), pp. 4, 7, 11.

understanding of its relationship between people (makers, consumers and users) and society at a given time. Altered surviving dresses, for example, tell us a great deal about how women mended, remade, kept up with fashion's changes, and even their life-cycle.<sup>13</sup> The object-based approach, therefore, is central to this thesis, and is employed as a way to build and test texts and images against actual dresses within cultural and historical contexts.

Material culture, nevertheless, does not conform to one definition or one field, such as museum studies, art history or archaeology. The scholar of American studies Thomas Schlereth makes the point that material culture is a form of investigation that:

uses artefacts (along with relevant documentary, statistical, and oral data) to explore cultural questions both in certain established disciplines (such as history or anthropology) and in certain research fields (such as the history of technology or the applied arts).<sup>14</sup>

Different disciplines, though, have different ways to approach material culture.<sup>15</sup> British anthropologists and archaeologists, such as Daniel Miller and Christopher Tilley consider material culture studies as an interdisciplinary project.<sup>16</sup> Their works combine anthropological concepts of consumption studies with sociology or cultural studies. Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood, for example, have argued that consumption is 'a system of reciprocal rituals', and 'the very arena in which culture is fought over and licked into shape'.<sup>17</sup> The studies of Arjun Appadurai and Igor Kopytoff contend that consumption is not only a matter of individual choice, but also reflects the cultural

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<sup>13</sup> Undoubtedly, there are a few surviving dresses of early periods, the working class and the poor.

<sup>14</sup> Cited in A. D. Hood, 'Material Culture: the Object', in S. Barber and C. M. Peniston-Bird (eds.), *History beyond the Text: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources* (2009), pp. 176-198(p. 177). Also see A. S. Martin and J. R. Garrison, 'Shaping the Field: the Multidisciplinary Perspectives of Material Culture', in idem (eds.), *American Material Culture: Shaping the Field* (1997), pp. 1-21; A. A. Berger, *Reading Matter: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Material Culture* (1992).

<sup>15</sup> On historical research in material culture, see K. Harvey (ed.), *History and Material Culture: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources* (2009); R. Grassby, 'Material Culture and Cultural History', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 35:4(2005), 591-603. On material culture in design history see J. Attfield, *Wild Things: the Material Culture of Everyday Life* (Oxford, 2000). On museum studies in material culture, see S. Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections* (Leicester, 1992); idem, *Museum Studies in Material Culture* (Leicester, 1989). There are other material culture approaches from ethnology, folklore, geography, literary and sociology. See, B. Brown, *A Sense of Things: the Object matter of American Literature* (Chicago, 2003); H. Glassie, *Material Culture* (1999); T. Dant, *Material Culture in the Social World: Values, Activities, Lifestyles* (Buckingham, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> D. Hicks and M. C. Beaudry (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies* (Oxford, 2010); D. Miller, *Stuff* (Cambridge 2010); idem (ed.), *Anthropology and the Individual: A Material Culture Perspective* (2009); C. Tilley (ed.), *Handbook of Material Culture* (2006).

<sup>17</sup> M. Douglas and B. Isherwood, *The World of Goods: towards An Anthropology of Consumption* (1996), pp. xxii, 37. It was originally published in 1979.

meanings and economic communities of things.<sup>18</sup> *The Journal of Material Culture*, established in 1996, has provided an interdisciplinary forum to study material culture within anthropology, archaeology, design studies, history, human geography and museology etc. The interdisciplinary journal *Fashion Theory*, launched in 1997, and *The Study of Dress History* (2002) by Lou Taylor have also suggested studying dress and fashion through an interdisciplinary approach.<sup>19</sup> The economic historian Giorgio Riello describes ‘the material culture of fashion’ as ‘a hybrid methodology borrowed from anthropology and archaeology in which the object is central in the study of social, cultural and economic practices that are time specific’. For Riello this includes an analysis of ‘personal and affective meaning, economic barriers, uses and habits, as well as gender and age differences’.<sup>20</sup> This thesis adopts this interdisciplinary methodology, drawing on literature, gender and social history, culture studies, visual culture and object-based analysis. Seeing clothes as ‘material culture’ allows the thesis to provide a more comprehensive understanding and integrated knowledge of the clothes culture of middle-class women.

### Historical Studies of Nineteenth-Century Dress and Accessories

Since the 1980s, dress has been increasingly studied within a socio-cultural and gendered context. In *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie* (1981/1994), the French historian Philippe Perrot recognises that clothing reflected and embodied the values, aspirations and anxieties of the French bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century.<sup>21</sup> *Fashion and Eroticism* (1985) by Valerie Steele argues that Victorian women used fashionable clothes to create their own sexual beauty and their ideal of self, rather than being a form of oppression.<sup>22</sup> Also, *Adorned in Dreams* (1985/2003) by Elizabeth Wilson sees that

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<sup>18</sup> A. Appadurai, ‘Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value’, in idem (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 3-63; I. Kopytoff, ‘The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process’, in *Ibid.*, pp. 64-94.

<sup>19</sup> Taylor, *Study of Dress*. Also see C. Turbin, ‘Refashioning the Concept of Public/Private: Lessons from Dress Studies’, *Journal of Women’s History*, 15:1(2003), 43-51.

<sup>20</sup> G. Riello, ‘The Object of Fashion: Methodological Approaches to the History of Fashion’, *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 3 (2011), <http://www.aestheticsandculture.net/index.php/jac/rt/prINTERfriendly/8865/12789>>[accessed 4 November 2013] For the three different approaches: the story of things, the story from things and the story with things, see idem, ‘Things that Shape History: Material Culture and Historical Narratives’, in Harvey (ed.), *History and Material Culture*, pp. 24-47.

<sup>21</sup> P. Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie: A History of Clothing in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ, 1994), p. xii. It was originally published in French in 1981.

<sup>22</sup> V. Steele, *Fashion and Eroticism: Ideals of Feminine Beauty from the Victorian Era to the Jazz Age* (Oxford, 1985). On fashion and eroticism, see *Fashion Theory*, 3:4(1999). On fashion and fetishism, see D. Kunzle, *Fashion and Fetishism: Corsets, Tight-Lacing & Other Forms of Body-Sculpture* (2006).

fashion is not repressive to women, but the form in which people experienced.<sup>23</sup> In *Nineteenth Century Fashion* (1992), Penelope Byrde incorporates study of the social context, technical change and dress etiquette to reveal the development of fashion and the evolution of styles in upper and middle-class dresses.<sup>24</sup> *The Culture of Fashion* (1995) by Christopher Breward points out that fashionable clothes disclose the roles played by individuals within historical processes under a range of cultural and social influences, in particular as regards gender ideologies.<sup>25</sup> Despite the absence of surviving dresses in these works, through socio-cultural and gender analyses clothing becomes an important indicator of Victorian culture. This thesis draws on this methodological frame to analyse middle-class women's clothes.

Over the past ten years, the study of men's fashion and non-elite clothing has undergone a profound transformation. *The Hidden Consumer* (1999) by Christopher Breward provides complex evidence of late Victorian men's involvement in clothing practices and the importance of fashion for urban male identity.<sup>26</sup> *The Cut of his Coat* (2006) by Brent Shannon looks at the more active role in clothes consumption played by middle-class British men in the period 1860-1914, while *Men and Menswear* (2007) by Laura Ugolini focuses on the retailing and distribution of men's clothing in the period 1880-1939.<sup>27</sup> The works of Breward, Shannon and Ugolini certainly point to a material shift in the study of class and culture, but the extent to which dress practices shaped the class identity of mid-Victorian middle-class women has remained unclear. Furthermore, the interest of nineteenth-century dress historians seems to have shifted towards the clothing of the working classes and the poor, especially since 'The Dress of the Poor 1750-1900 conference' in 1999.<sup>28</sup> Rachel Worth has studied the representation of rural working clothes in the novels, paintings and photographs of the second half of the nineteenth century, arguing that women's sun bonnets and men's smock frocks symbolised the importance of the rural working class: 'in terms of the nature of the agricultural work for which they were worn and, secondly (in the case of smocks), in terms of the handicraft skills they represented'.<sup>29</sup> Vivienne Richmond contends that:

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<sup>23</sup> E. Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (2003), rev. edn.

<sup>24</sup> P. Byrde, *Nineteenth Century Fashion* (1992).

<sup>25</sup> Breward, *Culture of Fashion*.

<sup>26</sup> C. Breward, *The Hidden Consumer: Masculinities, Fashion and City Life 1860-1914* (Manchester, 1999).

<sup>27</sup> B. Shannon, *The Cut of his Coat: Man, Dress, and Consumer Culture in Britain, 1860-1914* (2006); L. Ugolini, *Men and Menswear: Sartorial Consumption in Britain 1880-1939* (Aldershot, 2007).

<sup>28</sup> On the dress of the poor, see the special issue *Textile History*, 33:1(2002).

<sup>29</sup> R. Worth, *Clothing the Landscape: Representations of Rural Working Class 1850-1900* (Oxford, forthcoming); idem, "Developing A Method for the Study of the Clothing of the 'Poor': Some Themes in

in nineteenth-century England dress advertised the poor's occupational, regional, social and political status. Inseparable from the sense of self, it was a determinant of respectability and social inclusion, a key element in public rituals and private fantasies and a site of both class interaction and conflict.<sup>30</sup>

Despite the fact that more research materials and surviving dresses are available than for the non-elite, the dress practices of middle-class women have not yet, however, been explored in as much detail as those of the working class.

Although historians have increasingly used material objects and textual evidence, their studies often focus on accessories or everyday objects rather than clothes. Still, few have studied surviving dresses.<sup>31</sup> This could be because objects are not at the core of their research. Historians are usually trained to work primarily with texts.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps they have rarely worked closely with surviving dresses. Barbara Burman uses the pocket to explore gender differences in nineteenth-century Britain, while Carole Turbin investigates how detachable collars fashioned and changed American middle-class masculinity, through the study of early twentieth-century collar advertisements.<sup>33</sup> The three-volume collection of essays (2009) edited by Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin reveals how objects and their production and consumption served to create women's identity between 1750 and 1950:<sup>34</sup> Andrea Kolasinski Marcinkus, for example, asserts that, for middle and upper-class American women of the mid to late nineteenth century, making fancywork not only embraced an ephemeral aesthetic, but also established permanence in terms of memory, relationships

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the Visual Representation of Rural Working-Class Dress, 1850-1900", *Textile History*, 40:1(2009), 70-96; idem, 'Rural Working-Class Dress, 1850-1900: A Peculiarly English Tradition?', in C. Breward, B. Conekin and C. Cox (eds.), *The Englishness of English Dress* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 97-112; R. Worth, 'Rural Laboring Dress, 1850-1900: Some Problems of Representation', *Fashion Theory*, 3:3(1999), 323-342(p. 332).

<sup>30</sup> V. Richmond, *Clothing the Poor in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 2013); idem and C. Rose (eds.), *Clothing, Society and Culture in Nineteenth-Century England, Vol. 3: Working-Class Dress* (2011); V. Richmond, "'Indiscriminate Liberality Subverts the Morals and Depraves the Habits of the Poor': A Contribution to the Debate on the Relief and Clothing Societies in Early Nineteenth-Century England", *Textile History*, 40:1(2009), 51-69; idem, 'No Finery': *The Dress of the Poor in Nineteenth-Century England* (2004), PhD thesis, University of London, p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> For example, the talk of the social historian Carolyn Steedman - 'Stockings and Stays: Making Material' in Pasold Conference 2013 is completely without examining surviving objects.

<sup>32</sup> On how material culture is now being used in mainstream historical practice and teaching, see Harvey (ed.), *History and Material Culture*.

<sup>33</sup> B. Burman, 'Pocketing the Difference: Gender and Pocket in Nineteenth-Century Britain', in B. Burman and C. Turbin (eds.), *Material Strategies: Dress and Gender in Historical Perspective* (2002), pp. 77-99; C. Turbin, 'Fashioning the American Man: the Arrow Collar Man, 1907-1931', in *Ibid.*, pp. 100-121.

<sup>34</sup> M. D. Goggin and B. F. Tobin (eds.), *Material Women, 1750-1950: Consuming Desires and Collecting Practices* (Farnham, 2009); idem, *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles 1750-1950* (Farnham, 2009); idem, *Women and Things, 1750-1950: Gendered Material Strategies* (Farnham, 2009).

and life events.<sup>35</sup> *Accessories to Modernity* (2010) by Susan Hiner states that the *corbeille de mariage*, cashmere shawls, parasols, fans, and handbags, functioned as a significant marker of the bourgeois woman in French modernity,<sup>36</sup> while *Victorian Fashion Accessories* (2012), by Ariel Beaujot, argues that fashionable accessories such as gloves, fans, parasols and vanity sets helped Victorian English middle-class women to shape their femininity, differentiate their class identity from that of other social classes, as well as representing the role played by women in imperialism.<sup>37</sup> The thesis explores how clothes as well as clothing production and consumption communicated messages about the values mid-Victorian middle-class women held.

Self and identity have emerged as a key issue in dress studies. In *Fashion, Culture and Identity* (1992), Fred Davis argues that fashionable clothing expresses a consumer's social identity, because 'it is framed by social values with a bearing on gender, sexuality, social status, age, etc.'<sup>38</sup> Laura Bovone goes on to state that, besides being an indicator of social identity, fashion influences personal identities, such as the way of presenting oneself and shaping one's body.<sup>39</sup> *Fashion and its Social Agendas* (2000) by Diana Crane highlights the fact that, in nineteenth-century industrial societies, class and gender hierarchies provided the structure for fashion practices. French working-class wives before 1875, for example, found it more difficult than their husbands to imitate the clothes of the middle and upper classes because they laboured under the idealised role of middle- and upper-class women, who 'did not have to perform household tasks or to work outside the home'. In contrast with unmarried women, too, they spent more money on the clothing of their husbands and children than on their own.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, most sociologists have focused on studying social structures and behaviour associated with clothing rather than histories or real objects.

Dress and fashion historians have also looked at how clothes have been used to fashion gender, class and national identity. The essay collection of *The Englishness of English Dress* (2002) explores how the clothes of the English represented their English identities: Aileen Ribeiro, for instance, comments that English styles of women's dress were 'either native inventions or were taken to exaggerated proportions,

<sup>35</sup> A. K. Marcinkus, 'Preservation and Permanence: American Women and Nature Fancywork in Nineteenth Century', in *Ibid.*, pp. 131-153.

<sup>36</sup> S. Hiner, *Accessories to Modernity: Fashion and the Feminine in Nineteenth-Century France* (Pennsylvania, 2010).

<sup>37</sup> A. Beaujot, *Victorian Fashion Accessories* (Oxford, 2012), p. 4.

<sup>38</sup> F. Davis, *Fashion, Culture and Identity* (1992), p. 191.

<sup>39</sup> L. Bovone, 'Fashion, Identity and Social Actors', in idem and A. M. Gonzalez (eds.), *Identities through Fashion: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (2012), pp. 67-93.

<sup>40</sup> D. Crane, *Fashion and its Social Agendas: Class Gender, and Identity in Clothing* (2000), pp. 29, 63.

or continued after they had become out of vogue elsewhere’, giving as an example the hooped skirts of the late Elizabethan period (revived in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) and the Victorian bustle.<sup>41</sup> Another essay collection, *Fashion and Modernity* (2005), on the other hand, analyses how fashion and modernity have been used to construct identity and body image, as well as nationality and gender.<sup>42</sup> Christopher Breward’s study also makes the point that, in order to attract a female audience, the clothing of actresses in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century London shifted from a focus on sexual titillation to glamorous sartorial display, and describes how the clothing of celebrity actresses later became a commercial product, reflecting the development of consumer culture and democratisation.<sup>43</sup> The joint exhibition ‘French Impressionism and Fashion between the 1860s and 1880s’ has displayed in the Musée d’Orsay in Paris, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Art Institute of Chicago between 25 September 2012 and 22 September 2013, and its two accompanying catalogues *Impressionism, Fashion and Modernity* and *Fashion in Impressionist Paris* suggest that the Impressionists’ work functions as a lens to depict for us not only the sitters’ modern lives and social activities but also their fashionable clothes.<sup>44</sup> This thesis aims to investigate how dress projected the multiple identities of English middle-class women in the mid-Victorian era, and how these women managed their position as modern subjects.

### Historical Studies of Victorian Middle-Class Women

For the past three decades, the theory of separate spheres has been challenged by a range of social and gender historians of the nineteenth century.<sup>45</sup> In *Family Fortunes* (1987/2002), Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall address how gender ideology shaped class formation by studying the provincial Evangelical middle classes between 1780 and 1850, arguing that Christianity helped middle-class men to define their masculinity,

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<sup>41</sup> A. Ribeiro, ‘On Englishness in Dress’, in Breward et al. (eds.), *Englishness*, pp. 15-27(pp. 21-22).

<sup>42</sup> “‘Modernisation’ refers to the processes of scientific, technological, industrial, economic and political innovation that also become urban, social and artistic in their impact. ‘Modernity’ refers to the way that modernisation infiltrates everyday life and permeates sensibilities. And ‘Modernism’ refers to a wave of avant-garde artistic movements that, from the early twentieth century, onwards, in some way responded to, or represented, these changes in sensibility and experiences”. L. Tickner, *Modern Lives and Modern Subjects* (New Haven, 2000), pp. 184-214, cited in C. Breward and C. Evans (eds.), *Fashion and Modernity* (2005), p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> C. Breward, ‘Ambiguous Role Models: Fashion, Modernity and the Victorian Actress’, in *Ibid.*, pp. 101-120.

<sup>44</sup> G. Groom (ed.), *Impressionism, Fashion, and Modernity* (Chicago, 2012); D. N. Mancoff, *Fashion in Impressionist Paris* (2012).

<sup>45</sup> On new perspectives on gender studies, see J. Hamlett and S. Wiggins, ‘Victorian Women in Britain and the United States: New Perspectives’, *Women’s History Review*, 18:5(2009), 705-717.

through having an occupation to support their families, and women to demonstrate their femininity, by serving their families at home.<sup>46</sup> Middle-class women were not allowed to do paid work even when their family might have been in need of extra income, since this would have damaged the family's respectable reputation.<sup>47</sup> Jeanne Peterson, however, points out that the Paget gentlewomen played an active role in a variety of social activities and also enjoyed paid work, though they did not need to earn a living,<sup>48</sup> and Amanda Vickery argues that the separate spheres argument is based on inadequate historical evidence, and that it does not accord with many aspects of gender studies.<sup>49</sup> Eleanor Gordon and Gwyneth Nair, meanwhile, explore the public lives of middle-class women in the West End of Glasgow in the second half of the nineteenth-century, many of whom lived in woman-headed households and 'were not the social dependants of men'.<sup>50</sup> The work of Simon Morgan shows that though Victorian middle-class women were involved in a wide range of outdoor activities, they did not inhabit the same public sphere as men,<sup>51</sup> and *Material Relations* (2010) by Jane Hamlett treats domestic interiors as a medium through which gendered identities and spaces might be understood.<sup>52</sup> This thesis certainly benefits from this existing scholarship on women's history in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, but it also seeks to take a step further by examining women's history from the perspective of clothes. By focusing on what women wore, this study attempts to show how clothes acted as a window into broader aspects of middle-class women's lives and identities, and gender relations in general. In this thesis, gender is used as a primary category to produce a nuanced historical study of the dress worn by mid-Victorian middle-class women.

The construction of femininity has been another important aspect of Victorian studies. *Silent Sisterhood* (1977) by Patricia Branca studies domestic femininity, and in

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<sup>46</sup> L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle-Class 1780-1850* (2002), rev. edn.

<sup>47</sup> Y. C. Draznin, *Victorian London's Middle-Class Housewife: What she Did All Day* (2001), p. 9; M. J. Peterson, 'The Victorian Governess: Status Incongruence in Family and Society', *Victorian Studies*, 14:1(1970), 7-26(p. 10). Owing to the growing imbalance in the sex ratio in the mid and late Victorian periods, middle-class parents came to realise that their daughters might not be able to marry and therefore had to be educated for work beyond governing or teaching. *Westminster Review* (1850) revealed that there were 500,000 'surplus women'. Draznin, *Housewife*, p. 7.

<sup>48</sup> M. J. Peterson, *Family, Love, and Work in the Lives of Victorian Gentlewomen* (Bloomington, IN, 1989), pp. 121-123, 134-138; idem, 'No Angels in the House: The Victorian Myth and the Paget Women', *The American Historical Review*, 89:3(1984), 667-708(p. 694).

<sup>49</sup> A. Vickery, 'Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History', *The Historical Journal*, 36:2(1993), 383-414(p. 385).

<sup>50</sup> E. Gordon and G. Nair, *Public Lives: Women, Family, and Society in Victorian Britain* (2005), p. 177.

<sup>51</sup> S. Morgan, *A Victorian Woman's Place: Public Culture in the Nineteenth Century* (2007), p. 136.

<sup>52</sup> J. Hamlett, *Material Relations: Domestic Interiors and Middle-Class Families in England 1850-1910* (Manchester, 2010).



particular how most Victorian middle-class housewives dealt with heavy housework. They had to manage servants, as well as assisting their husbands with their business, and some also needed to sew their own dresses, as well as those of their children.<sup>53</sup> In *Representing Femininity* (1992), Mary Jean Corbett explores how middle-class women writers, actresses and suffragettes often represented the ideology of female domesticity and selflessness in their autobiographies, given that they had to negotiate tensions between femininity and fame, religious obedience and publishing ambition, and motherhood and the market place in the patriarchal society of Victorian and Edwardian times.<sup>54</sup> *Nobody's Angels* (1995) by Elizabeth Langland argues that Victorian middle-class women required significant household management skills to challenge the ideology of middle-class womanhood as the 'Angel in the House' (in other words, a passive, dependent and idle creature), as proposed by Davidoff and Hall.<sup>55</sup> *Impossible Purities* (1998) by Jennifer Brody, on the other hand, analyses Victorian novels to discuss the sexualised, radicalised and moralised identities related to blackness and whiteness and "the utility of black women (mulattas, octoroons, prostitutes) [...] as a new form of 'white' male subjectivity". Brody's work also reminds us that people cannot always be divided into neat categories.<sup>56</sup> In *A Man's Place* (1999), John Tosh argues that domesticity was crucial to masculinity in mid-Victorian Britain (1830-70): a man spent a great deal of time at home, providing instruction for his wife, and as a father he presided over family holidays, played with the children, and took responsibility for the education, morality and careers of his sons.<sup>57</sup> The methodology he uses to study how a husband's masculinity was determined by his wife's character has established a new model for gender studies.

This thesis considers how clothes were used to construct mid-Victorian femininity, discusses whether mid-Victorian femininity was a fixed category and how prominent delicacy, domesticity, powerlessness and submissiveness were among all ages of middle-class women. While acknowledging the vital role of clothes in

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<sup>53</sup> P. Branca, *Silent Sisterhood: Middle Class Women in the Victorian Home* (1977); idem, 'Image and Reality: the Myth of the Idle Victorian Woman', in M. S. Hartman and L. Banner (eds.), *Clio's Consciousness Raised: New Perspective on the History of Women* (1974), pp. 179-191 (pp. 180, 188, 189).

<sup>54</sup> M. J. Corbett, *Representing Femininity: Middle-Class Subjectivity in Victorian and Edwardian Women's Autobiographies* (1992).

<sup>55</sup> E. Langland, *Nobody's Angels: Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture* (1995).

<sup>56</sup> J. Brody, *Impossible Purities: Blackness, Femininity, and Victorian Culture* (1998), p. 7.

<sup>57</sup> J. Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (1999); idem, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Essays on Gender, Family and Empire* (2005). Also, see M. Roper and J. Tosh (eds.), *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800* (1991).

maintaining masculine power in a patriarchal society, it questions the extent to which clothes are simply a symbol of repression. Also, it attempts to reveal the differences and similarities in the representation of mid-Victorian femininity in prescriptive literature, fashion plates, cartoons and photographs.

To sum up, this thesis aims to provide a full-scale exploration of the social relationship between clothes, middle-class women and their spectators in mid-Victorian England. The following section will explain the definition of the key term ‘middle class’ and the selection of sources and methodology, and provide an outline of the individual chapters.

### **Defining the Middle Classes**

As this thesis concentrates on middle-class women, it is important to clarify the key term ‘middle class’, and what the social life of middle-class women involved. The general definition of ‘middle class’ incorporates three factors: income, occupation, and the keeping of domestic servants. The annual income of the aristocracy was over £10,000 and that of the upper class was between £1,000 and £10,000, while the average annual income for the middle classes had to be at least £300 if it was to pay for a house, carriage, servants, food, dress and the education of children.<sup>58</sup> Pay and the cost of living were different in different areas, and therefore the concept of ‘middle class’ may not have been exactly the same, either. For example, the income of a mid-Victorian provincial medical doctor or curate rarely reached £300, and for this reason middle-class identity should perhaps be based on occupation rather than income.<sup>59</sup>

Eric J. Hobsbawm has provided a broader definition of the ‘middle class’, which differentiated itself from the aristocracy and the upper class by its active participation in the productive economy, and from the working class by ownership of property and abstention from manual labour. The number of the genuine middle class, including lawyers, doctors, merchants, bankers and large industrial owners, was not large, and the lower middle class might be said to include small-scale employers,

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<sup>58</sup> J. Lewis, ‘Introduction: Reconstructing Women’s Experience of Home and Family’, in idem (ed.), *Labour and Love: Women’s Experience of Home and Family 1850-1940* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 1-24(p. 7); T. McBride, *The Domestic Revolution: the Modernisation of Household Service in England and France 1820-1920* (1976), p. 19. In the old English currency, one pound was equivalent to 20 shillings or 240 pennies, and one guinea equivalent to 21 shillings.

<sup>59</sup> M. J. Peterson, *The Medical Profession in Mid-Victorian London* (1978). Patricia Branca points out that in 1867, about 42 per cent of middle-class families lived on an income of between £100 and £300 per annum. 150,000 middle-class families earned over £300 a year, 637,875 fell into the £100-£300 a year bracket, and 757,000 families had incomes of under £100 per year. Branca, *Sisterhood*, pp. 43-45.

shopkeepers and white-collar (or clean-handed) workers.<sup>60</sup> The ‘middle class’ has also been defined by the keeping of domestic servants, as if they had servants, the members of the middle classes would enjoy more time for leisure.<sup>61</sup> The number of domestic servants increased significantly between 1851 (1,300,000) and 1881 (2,000,000), and the cheapest servant cost 2s. a week, including board and lodging.<sup>62</sup> It was possible for a typical middle-class home to hire one servant, but this does not mean that every middle-class home had a servant in the house.<sup>63</sup> In the later 1860s, for example, the lowest threshold for a middle-class income in London was £99, living without servants in the house and paying a rent of £15 a year.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, the average cost of a boarding-school education was between £70 and £130 per year, and that of a governess between £15 and £100 per year, meaning that both could be afforded only by the wealthy.<sup>65</sup> The Paget gentlewomen, for example, were well educated, studying science, anthropology, the arts and languages such as Latin, Greek, French, Italian and German.<sup>66</sup> Most middle-class girls, however, were taught by their mother or older sisters at home.<sup>67</sup> Their reading materials were generally based on the Bible, and some might have also had the opportunity to read cheap anthologies which belonged to their parents or were borrowed from libraries. Middle-class housewives were expected to have the ability to do domestic work, keep household accounts and have a good knowledge of spelling, grammar, syntax and penmanship, in order to be able to teach their children and manage their families. It is clear that both sexes were not educated equally. In this thesis, I adopt a broad definition of ‘middle class’, including those who might have had as little as £99 annual income and may or may not have had a servant, and those who fell within a recognised middle-class occupational category.

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<sup>60</sup> E. J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire* (1968), pp. 129-131.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131; J. F. C. Harrison, *Early Victorian Britain 1832-1851* (Suffolk, 1979), pp. 136-137.

<sup>62</sup> Branca, *Sisterhood*, p. 25; Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain*, p. 87; W. T. Layton, ‘Changes in the Wages of Domestic Servants during Fifty Years’, *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, 71:3(1908), 515-524(p. 519).

<sup>63</sup> The average annual wages of a cook were about £20, those of a parlour maid £20, and a nurse or housemaid £16. Branca, *Sisterhood*, p. 54.

<sup>64</sup> Best, *Mid-Victorian Britain*, p. 90.

<sup>65</sup> Branca, ‘Image and Reality’, p. 185; J. Dunbar, *The Early Victorian Woman: 1837-1857* (1953), p. 136. On Victorian governess, see K. Hughes, *The Victorian Governess* (2001). Until 1848, there were no colleges for girls. Queen’s College, Bedford College, and Royal Holloway College were founded in 1848, 1849 and 1879 respectively.

<sup>66</sup> Peterson, *Victorian Gentlewomen*, esp. ch. 2, pp. 34-57; idem, ‘No Angels’, pp. 689-693.

<sup>67</sup> Branca, *Sisterhood*, p. 45; Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 291.

## Sources and Methodology

This thesis is based on the combination of six different types of sources: contemporary literature, surviving objects, illustrations, personal correspondence and records, material evidence of home-sewing sources, and consumption records and inventories.

The **first** set of materials is contemporary publications, namely prescriptive literature, women's magazines, articles from other periodicals and novels. Thanks to the development of printing technology, various publications became affordable to the middle classes in the mid-Victorian period. Prescriptive literature reveals how the ideal middle-class woman was supposed to behave, what particular dress styles, colours and materials it was appropriate for a woman of a given age to wear at a specific event in a particular season, and what acceptable standards of femininity were for different age groups in mid-Victorian Britain. Using over 63 advice manuals, located in the British Library (hereafter BL), and nearly a hundred articles from Gale Digital Databases (hereafter GD), Chapter One examines the way clothes were used to construct and maintain middle-class identity in accordance with social decorum. I should point out that it is certainly not my contention, however, that women were sexless creatures in private.<sup>68</sup>

The thesis also draws attention to the content of fashion columns in women's magazines, with a view to exploring the social and cultural values of mid-Victorian women through their clothing. This part of the study was based on three sets of women's magazines: *The New Monthly Belle Assemblée: A Magazine of Literature and Fashion* (1834-70) (hereafter NMBA), *Le Follet, Journal Du Grande Monde, Fashion, Polite Literature, Beaux Arts, &c* (1846-1900) (hereafter LF), and *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine: An Illustrated Journal, Combining Practical Information, Instruction, and Amusement* (1852-79) (hereafter EDM).<sup>69</sup> The reason these magazines were selected is because each targeted a slightly different group of middle-class women readers, and all enjoyed a huge circulation at the time. Such popular and representative magazines can be seen to show us how fashionable Victorian middle-class women were recommended to dress.

Other articles are drawn from a range of contemporary periodicals. Children's periodicals, for instance, including *The Children's Friend* (1825-59/1861-1929) (hereafter CF), *The Child's Companion* (1832-1923) (hereafter CC), and *Chatterbox*

<sup>68</sup> GD, <[http://find.galegroup.com/menu/commonmenu.do?userGroupName=rho\\_ttda](http://find.galegroup.com/menu/commonmenu.do?userGroupName=rho_ttda)>[accessed 13 November 2012] On Victorian sexuality, see Branca, *Sisterhood*, pp. 124-128; Peterson, *Victorian Gentlewomen*, pp. 66-68, 74-78.

<sup>69</sup> For details of these three women's magazines, see Chapter 2, pp. 78-81.

(1866-1953), help us to analyse how sewing was used to construct the femininity of Victorian girls.<sup>70</sup> Similarly, the comments in the *Sporting Gazette* (1862-79) reveal the viewpoint of mid-Victorians as regards women's participation in sport, and how they negotiated gender tensions when practising male-identified sports.<sup>71</sup>

Novels, too, were considered to be potentially as edifying and didactic as books on conduct, as well as throwing light on Victorian socio-cultural issues. Anne Buck argued that:

where dress is used to express character and illuminate social attitudes and relationships, the novel can give more. It then shows dress in action within the novelist's world.<sup>72</sup>

Lou Taylor in turn points out that 'the use of clothing by novelists can deepen our cultural understanding of the past through its coded signalling of gender, culture, politics and social stratum'.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, it is important to remember that novelists 'did not always write about contemporary society. Many of their novels were set, not in the historic past, but in the recent past, the time of their youth'.<sup>74</sup> Rachel Worth chooses the novels of Victorian realists Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-65) and Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) to explore the clothing of working-class men and women, because working-class clothes themselves have rarely survived.<sup>75</sup> This thesis uses four novels to pinpoint situations when Victorian women wore the wrong dress, how they judged others, and how people felt about their dress and about sewing: *North and South* (1855), by Elizabeth Gaskell; *Middlemarch* (1871-72) and *Daniel Deronda* (1876), by George Eliot (1819-80); and *Little Women* (1868), by Louisa May Alcott (1832-88).<sup>76</sup> Though the latter was written by an American writer, it was very popular in England, and in any case the two societies shared similar cultural experiences and perceptions.

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<sup>70</sup> *CF* was a penny monthly periodical. *Chatterbox* was a halfpenny weekly periodical, and its readers were generally lower middle-class children.

<sup>71</sup> *Sporting Gazette* was a weekly periodical which cost 3d. in 1862, rising to 4d. in 1864. L. Brake, M. Demoor et al. (eds.), *Dictionary of Nineteenth Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland* (2009), p. 592.

<sup>72</sup> A. Buck, 'Clothing in Fact and Fiction 1825-1865', *Costume*, 17(1983), 89-104(p. 89).

<sup>73</sup> Taylor, *Study of Dress*, p. 91.

<sup>74</sup> Buck, 'Clothing in Fiction', p. 89.

<sup>75</sup> R. Worth, 'Elizabeth Gaskell, Clothes and Class Identity', *Costume*, 32(1998), 52-59(p. 52); idem, 'Thomas Hardy and Rural Dress', *Costume*, 29(1995), 55-67. On the clothing of the working class in Victorian novels, see J. Maynard, 'Respectability in Dress in the Novels of Hesba Stretton', *Costume*, 32(1998), 60-68; H. Wood, 'Dress in Popular Nineteenth-Century Fiction', *Costume*, 24(1990), 85-93.

<sup>76</sup> Many literary scholars have studied clothing in Victorian novels, see C. B. Kortsch, *Dress Culture in late Victorian Women's Fiction: Literacy, Textiles, and Activism* (Farnham, 2009); C. Hughes, *Dressed in Fiction* (Oxford, 2006); J. Harvey, *Men in Black* (1995). Elizabeth Gaskell (née Stevenson) (1810-65) married the Unitarian minister William Gaskell (1805-84) in 1832. George Eliot was the pseudonym of Mary Anne Evans. She was brought up as a Protestant, but from 1842 she refused to go to church.

The **second** type of sources are 270 surviving dresses, taken from ten institutions: Blaise Castle House Museum, Bristol (hereafter BCM) (29); Bowes Museum, Durham (hereafter BM) (20); Chertsey Museum (hereafter CM) (9); Fashion Museum, Bath (hereafter FM) (15); Manchester City Galleries (hereafter MCG) (71); Museum of London (hereafter ML) (24); Rougemont House, Exeter (hereafter RH) (43); Victoria and Albert Museum (hereafter V&A) (25); Walker Art Gallery, National Museums Liverpool (hereafter WAG) (1); and Worthing Museum (hereafter WM) (17). Surviving dresses are regarded as a convincing proof of what people actually wore, and provide details of material, fabric designs, construction and sewing techniques which historical photographs are not equipped to reveal, though it is true that most examples lack supporting information such as who wore them, or where and when they were made and worn. Few of them, too, have kept their original form with the passage of time, and it should also be remembered that museum collections tend to privilege the wealthy. Jane Tozer, for example, comments that Cecil W. Cunnington's collections are based on the clothes of the well-off middle classes.<sup>77</sup> Despite these difficulties, however, an object-based approach should not be omitted from any study of the history of dress, as it is capable of revealing valuable data on how middle-class women negotiated fashion and morality.

Visual sources are one of the most important materials for the study of the history of dress, and they have strongly influenced how it has been written about. The **third** category of research material is visual sources, including cartoons, hand-coloured fashion plates, photographs and paintings. With the development of wood engravings, the single-plate caricature became rare, and by the mid-Victorian period, cartoons, which 'learnt to exploit linearity, topicality and speed of composition without entirely losing the codes, stereotypes and bluntness of the caricature tradition', had become the dominant comic mode for weekly middle-class periodicals.<sup>78</sup> Captions, accommodated in the typeset page alongside wood engravings, 'became the norm, and were important within the highly verbal Victorian consciousness in their ability to explain or comment on complex images'.<sup>79</sup> Alison Adburgham argues that:

social historians recognise *Punch* as a source of information, a reservoir of contemporary comment. Fashion historians, also, draw upon it with gratitude because in *Punch* are the clothes that men, women, and children really wore-

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<sup>77</sup> Tozer was the curator at Platt Hall in the 1980s. L. Taylor, *Establishing Dress History* (Manchester, 2004), p. 53.

<sup>78</sup> Brake et al., *Dictionary*, pp. 95, 98.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

not as in fashion plates and magazines, the clothes that designers wished to persuade them to wear.<sup>80</sup>

In other words, cartoons are not only indicators of clothing and appearance, but may also reveal the social, economic, political and psychological attitudes and values of middle-class Victorians, and provide an important balance to the images of historical studio photographs, in which sitters would always pose elegantly. Christina Walkley notes that ‘the cartoon exaggerates, to the same degree as the fashion plates, though in an opposite direction’, and Shu-chuan Yan argues that the female dress shown in *Punch* cartoons provides a valuable representation of British gender politics and national identity from the 1840s to the 1880s.<sup>81</sup> Similarly, Mike Huggins has pointed out that:

the combination of visual material and humorous text in sporting cartoons provides a potent way to help to tease out the meaning of the discursive sporting practices that constitute our understanding of sporting reality.<sup>82</sup>

The cartoons in this thesis are taken from *Punch or the London Charivari* (1841-2002) (hereafter *Punch*), *Fun* (1861-1901), *Judy or the London Serio-Comic Journal* (1867-95) (hereafter *Judy*), and *Funny Folks* (1874-94). Owing to their different political identifications and target audiences, these weekly magazines provide a variety of viewpoints on when women had come to accept a new fashion or to use the sewing machine, for example, or when they began to take part in sport. *Punch* was conservative, and most of its articles and illustrations were written by men.<sup>83</sup> It cost 3d., and was aimed at upper middle-class families.<sup>84</sup> *Fun*, on the other hand, cost 1d., and targeted the lower middle classes. *Fun* was liberal in political terms, and appealed to people to the ‘left of the public of *Punch*’.<sup>85</sup> Between 1865 and 1870, the circulation of *Fun* was estimated at 20,000, compared to *Punch*’s 40,000,<sup>86</sup> and J. Don Vann comments that *Fun* was ‘the second most important comic periodical in the Victorian period’.<sup>87</sup> *Judy*, which cost 2d., also targeted the lower middle classes, but its political

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<sup>80</sup> A. Adburgham, *A Punch History of Manners and Modes 1841-1940* (1961), p. 12.

<sup>81</sup> C. Walkley, *The Way to Wear ‘em: 150 Years of Punch on Fashion* (1985), pp. 12, 14; S. Yan, ‘“Politics and Petticoats”: Fashioning the Nation in *Punch* Magazine 1840-1880s’, *Fashion Theory*, 15:3(2011), 345-372.

<sup>82</sup> M. Huggins, ‘Cartoons and Comic Periodicals 1841-1901: A Satirical Sociology of Victorian Sporting Life’, in M. Huggins and J. A. Mangan (eds.), *Disreputable Pleasures: Less Virtuous Victorians at Play* (2004), pp. 124-150(p. 149).

<sup>83</sup> Walkley, *The Way to Wear ‘em*, p. 9.

<sup>84</sup> Brake et al., *Dictionary*, p. 518.

<sup>85</sup> A. Ellegard, ‘The Readership of the Periodical Press in Mid-Victorian Britain’, *Victorian Periodicals Newsletter*, 13:4(1971), 3-22(p. 21).

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>87</sup> J. D. Vann and R. T. VanArsdel, *Victorian Periodicals and Victorian Society* (Toronto, 1995), p. 287.

identification was Tory.<sup>88</sup> Its title shows that it was aimed at a female readership, and its *Ally Sloper* strips illustrated by the female cartoonist Isabelle Emilie de Tessier (pseudonym Marie Duval, 1850-90) appear to have been quite popular.<sup>89</sup> Lastly, *Funny Folks* cost ld., and targeted the lower middle-class and better-educated working-class readers. The cartoons included in this thesis reveal how Victorian commentators judged women's dress behaviour, views on how women should engage with dress, how gender could be organised through dress, and how dress played a key role in constructing femininity.

Fashion plates were well developed by this time, reaching their heyday in the third quarter of the century.<sup>90</sup> Vyvyan Holland makes the point that the purpose of a fashion plate was to show people the right style of dress to wear in order to keep abreast of the fashion of the time, and also to predict what fashionable dress might be worn in the near future. A costume plate, on the other hand, was designed to display a national or theatrical costume and to record past fashions, while a trade plate was a fashion advertisement that was issued by fashion houses or manufacturers of dress materials, its purpose being to suggest to buyers what kind of materials and colours might make the best dresses.<sup>91</sup> Compared to paintings, fashion plates were focused on displaying the style of dress, and so they have been widely used by innumerable authors to present the history of dress, though it should be mentioned that the earliest dress studies were based on analysing the clothes shown in individual plates rather than on studying the socio-cultural context.<sup>92</sup>

Furthermore, many dress historians have argued that the images shown in plates are not a faithful image of reality. Doris Langley Moore, for example, suggested that the 'fashion-plate has no other *raison d'être* than to impart information about the current or the coming mode', and Anne Buck argued that 'plates were extravagantly presented in order to capture the attention of fashionable women who would then purchase the dresses, but few Englishwomen dressed like the plates and followed the

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<sup>88</sup> Brake et al., *Dictionary*, p. 328.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 327. In 1873, *Ally Sloper: A Moral Lesson* became the world's first comic book.

<sup>90</sup> 'Colour printing began to creep in at the end of the 1880s'. V. Holland, *Hand Coloured Fashion Plates 1770-1899* (1955), p. 25. In 1865, the London shop Peter Robinson produced a photographic catalogue to sell their mourning dress. By the 1920s, fashion plates had been replaced by photographs. M. Ginsburg, *Victorian Dress in Photographs* (1982), p. 17.

<sup>91</sup> Holland, *Plates*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>92</sup> V. Foster, *A Visual History of Costume: the Nineteenth Century* (1984); M. Ginsburg, *An Introduction to Fashion Illustration* (1980); D. L. Moore, *Fashion through Fashion Plates 1771-1970* (1971); Holland, *Plates*; J. Laver, *Costume Illustration: The Nineteenth Century* (1947); idem, *Fashion and Fashion Plates 1800-1900* (1943).



fashion changes'.<sup>93</sup> Taking into account such criticisms, this thesis also includes other visual sources, such as cartoons, photographs, paintings and surviving dresses, in order to balance the disadvantages of fashion plates. Chapter Two examines in detail to what extent English middle-class women followed the fashion shown in fashion plates. In addition to the images of fashionable dresses and accessories, the chapter argues that fashion plates reveal the social concepts of the time as regards physical beauty, desirable lifestyle, leisure activities and up-to-date consumer products. The fashion plates used in this thesis are not limited to the three sets of women's magazines (*EDM*, *NMBA* and *LF*), but are also taken from fashion-plate scrapbooks, some of which were cut out by Miss Olive Mary Matthews (1887-1979) and donated to the CM, while others were collected by FM, ML, RH and WM.<sup>94</sup>

In the 1860s, photography also became cheaper and thus available to a wider range of people. Historical photographs might serve to further balance the representations in cartoons and fashion plates, and show the proper dress that was expected to be worn by middle-class women. In contrast to surviving dresses, photographs offer important images of Victorian dresses as worn in a particular historical moment, given that textiles were rather expensive in the nineteenth century and dresses were often altered for the younger generation or to adapt to new styles and the latest fashions. Similarly, delicate ornamentation could have worn out, been removed or disappeared over the years. However, Victorian photography was not yet able to reproduce all colours, so photographers recommended that sitters wore specific colours and fabrics in order to produce a clear image, which may therefore not represent either fashion at the time or the taste of the sitters. Historical studio photographs, like surviving dresses, often also lack additional information, such as when the photograph was taken, who the sitter was, and the purpose of the image, though most do provide the title and address of the studio and the name of the photographer, which can help us to trace when the studio was in operation, where the photographs were taken, and what social class the sitter might have belonged to. Other potential problems related to the

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<sup>93</sup> Moore, *Plates*, p. 11; A. Buck, *Victorian Costume and Costume Accessories* (Carlton, 1984), rev. 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., p. 8. It was originally published in 1961.

<sup>94</sup> This reveals how Victorian women liked and treasured fashion plates. Another example of this, Barbara Johnson (1738-1825) collected fashion plates and materials she admired and used them in her albums. N. Rothstein (ed.), *Barbara Johnson's Album of Fashions and Fabrics* (1987). Anne Higonnet has argued that 'for many women, collecting fashion plates for albums replaced painting their own watercolours. This perception of artistry symbolically conflated fashion with art. In turn, artists embrace fashion as a symbol of modernity'. Cited in K. N. Best, 'Text and Image in Fashion Periodicals of the Second French Empire', in N. Grigorian, T. Baldwin, and M. Rigaud-Drayton (eds.), *Text and Image in Modern European Culture* (West Lafayette, IN, 2012), pp. 101-114(p. 106).

use of such visual devices are analysed in Chapter Three. This thesis includes 754 studio photographs from four institutions: FM (171), the Prints and Drawings study room in V&A (hereafter PDVA) (208), RH (54) and WM (321). These photograph collections are drawn from more than 82 studios in 45 British counties, as well as five foreign countries.<sup>95</sup> Additionally, over three hundred examples, used for reference only, were taken from the V&A online collection (hereafter VAO) (158) and from published books.<sup>96</sup>

Different kinds of visual sources might also target different social groups, and have different ways of presenting them. This thesis does not concentrate on portrait paintings because they were generally only affordable for the wealthy, compared with studio photographs.<sup>97</sup> The thesis does, though, examine four paintings in order to provide an alternative view of how ordinary people engaged in sewing and sporting activities, to counterbalance the main visual sources.

The **fourth** category of material evidence covers a series of home-sewing sources used by middle-class women, including sewing handbooks, paper patterns and advertisements. Though there were many sewing manuals, such as the *Ladies' Hand-book of Millinery, Dressmaking, and Tatting* (1843) *The Hand-book of Dress-making* (1845) and *A Simple, and Complete Method of Dressmaking* (1855), designed to help housewives, ladies' maids or servants to make children's clothing, men's shirts and women's unfitted articles, they tended to focus on basic rather than fashionable garments.<sup>98</sup> By the 1860s, though, many British women's magazines, such as *The World of Fashion* (1824-91) (hereafter *WF*), *EDM* and *The Young Ladies' Journal* (1864-1920), provided paper patterns and step-by-step dressmaking notes, so that middle-class women could easily make their own fashionable dresses. The development of pattern drafting and grading methods is also considered to have accelerated changes in fashion.

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<sup>95</sup> 86 individual cards bore no details of the studio, and 25 *cartes* are displayed in a Victorian album, so it is impossible to identify the origin of the photographs. More people were able to travel abroad, so they could also have been photographed in foreign countries.

<sup>96</sup> The majority of the VAO collections belonged to the Guy Little Theatrical Collection. Since it is hard to clarify whether these images were of stage costumes, fancy dress or the fashionable dress of the day, they were only used to compare and contrast with other examples.

<sup>97</sup> Stella Mary Newton pioneered the use of the art historical approach for the study of the history of dress. She was an expert on clothing in Renaissance art. On visual approaches, see A. Ribeiro. 'Re-Fashioning Art: Some Visual Approaches to the Study of the History of Dress', *Fashion Theory*, 2:4(1998), 315-326; M. Pointon, *History of Art: A Student's Handbook* (1997), rev. edn. On Impressionist paintings and fashion, see Groom (ed.), *Impressionism*; Mancoff, *Fashion*.

<sup>98</sup> J. S. Emery, 'Development of the American Commercial Pattern Industry: the First Generation, 1850-1880', *Costume*, 31(1997), 78-91(p. 79).

After the repeal of advertising tax in 1862, advertisements became the main source of finance for periodicals. Patricia Branca makes the point that middle-class women were a prime target for advertising, in particular products like the open fireplace, the sewing machine and stoves, because they were regarded as the household manager.<sup>99</sup> Though the products shown in advertisements do not always indicate real use by consumers, the increasing presence of a particular product does seem to show its growing importance in people's lives:<sup>100</sup> between 1860 and 1880, for instance, 'sewing machine advertising constituted as much as 80 per cent of domestic machine advertisements'.<sup>101</sup> Thomas Richards states that the Great Exhibition of 1851 was the point of departure for modern advertising, reflecting Victorians' increasing awareness of the material world,<sup>102</sup> and Lori A. Loeb argues that 'advertisements reveal an important cultural pattern'.<sup>103</sup> However, no historians have so far analysed how sewing machines reflected English middle-class women's identities, or what impact they may have had on gender relations. Chapter Four will dissect how the visual image or verbal descriptions found in advertisements represent the socio-cultural meaning of the sewing machine for middle-class women. This analysis is based on nearly 250 advertisements, published by contemporary periodicals and drawn from GD.

The **fifth** category of research material comprises letters and diaries, and enquiries from contemporary periodicals. The letters and diaries used in this thesis are taken from B&I, and written by noted women writers, such as Mrs Jane Carlyle, Charlotte Brontë (1816-55), Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot, Geraldine Jewsbury and Octavia Hill (1838-1912).<sup>104</sup> Personal correspondence and records can help to understand the lived experiences of middle-class women, such as how they dressed and behaved in their clothes, why they made their clothing, what they felt about their own clothes and those of others, and how much money they spent on it. It is important, though, to bear in mind that letters and diaries are not an unmediated source. As E. P. Thompson reminded us, 'we have evidence not of a spontaneous unmediated attitude

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<sup>99</sup> Branca, *Sisterhood*, p. 50.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>101</sup> L. A. Loeb, *Consuming Angels: Advertising and Victorian Women* (Oxford, 1994), p. 43.

<sup>102</sup> T. Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England: Advertising and Spectacle 1851-1914* (Stanford, CA, 1990).

<sup>103</sup> Cited in Loeb, *Consuming Angels*, p. 180; Branca, *Sisterhood*, p. 51.

<sup>104</sup> B&I, <<http://solomon.bwld.alexanderstreet.com>> [accessed 13 November 2012] Charlotte Brontë wrote her famous novel *Jane Eyre* (1847) under the pseudonym Currer Bell, and married her father's curate Arthur Bell Nicholls in 1854. Octavia Hill, whose father was corn merchant and banker James Hill and her mother the educationalist and writer Caroline Southwood Smith, was also a social reformer. Her grandfather was the physician and sanitary reformer Thomas Southwood Smith (1788-1861), and her oldest sister Miranda Hill (Wisbech 1836-1910) was also a social reformer.

but of this transcribed into an approved self-image (perhaps with approved doctrinal after-thoughts), like someone arranging his face in a looking-glass'.<sup>105</sup> Letters and diaries can therefore provide us with valuable insights into contemporary ideology and into how individuals negotiated their relationships with social and cultural expectations. Unfortunately daily work such as sewing often goes unrecorded in diaries, though Mrs Carlyle's letters were one of the most fruitful collections. For this thesis, we have thus chosen to include the dress enquiries published in women's magazines, which provide further details of women readers' attitudes towards sewing.

The **sixth** type of source includes tailors' and dressmakers' records, dress bills, account books and inventories. Though the letters and diaries do contain some clothing and material bills, there is neither a complete record of personal expenditure nor a wealth of private records. Furthermore, as regards archival sources, the notebooks and diaries of mid-Victorian tailors or dressmakers seem to be absent, and most of the extant bills and account books of middle-class women record expenditure on food and household goods rather than on clothing. This suggests that women might have been inclined to show what they had bought for their family rather than recording what they spent on adorning themselves, in accordance with the established ideals for women's domesticity.<sup>106</sup>

As detailed personal commentaries on their clothes are surprisingly rare on the part of Victorian middle-class women, in this thesis I analyse those of three individuals: Mrs Marianne Grove Price (1805-68), the widow of an M.P.; Mrs Mary Baker (1815-1905), the wife of an English educationalist, social reformer and ornithologist; and Mrs Mary Ann Spring (1803-78), the wife of a builder. Their account books and clothing bills are held at the Gloucester Archives (hereafter GA). The two notebooks belonging to an unknown tailor from GA (1864-66) and to Miss Clarke's dressmaker (1873-75), from Surrey History Centre (hereafter SHC), both contain the names of customers and the details and costs of items ordered. These materials are invaluable, as they allow us to build up a picture of dress consumption among middle-class women.

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<sup>105</sup> E. P. Thompson, 'Anthropology and the Discipline of Historical Context', *Midland History*, 1:3(1972), 41-55(p. 42).

<sup>106</sup> Out of their domestic shopping, women were able to save a little for their pin money, with which they could then buy personal items. Susan Staves argues that 'pin-money could mean a substantial private income for a woman during marriage and failure to pay it could lead to litigation'. 'Pin-money is a manifestation of the greater liberalization of relations between spouses in the eighteenth century.' Such arrangements were also to the benefit of men, and it was not inconsistent with a patriarchal view that women should be kept content. S. Staves, *Married Women's Separate Property in England 1660-1833* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 131-132.

In addition, this thesis examines an unusual and significant source, namely the clothing inventories of 26 women who died between 1850 and 1875 in Central and Southern England, from the Legacy Duty papers (IR19-95 to IR19-149), part of the records of the Boards of Stamps, Taxes, Excise, and the Inland Revenue, which are held in the National Archives (hereafter NA) at Kew.<sup>107</sup> Because probate inventories had largely ceased to be made since the late eighteenth century, it is not possible to carry out a quantitative analysis of large-scale data sets. The study of Lorna Weatherill, for example, analysed three thousand probate inventories in early modern England.<sup>108</sup> These 26 female clothing inventories therefore represent a rare and important source which allows us to examine the consumer behaviour of mid-Victorian Englishwomen.

Inventories, as with other historical sources, bring with them their own problems. The inventory is often a brief list of possessions recorded at the time of death, which does not provide evidence of when, where, why or how the deceased acquired and used such possessions. In other words, the objects listed in inventories only represent those that belonged to the deceased at the end of their lives.<sup>109</sup> Some of the deceased's possessions could also have been passed on to family members or to others before the inventory was made, and therefore the inventory might not represent the complete wardrobe of the deceased. In addition, the 26 female inventories sampled here do not contain a will, so it is difficult to know whether the items of clothing not recorded in the inventories were actually passed on to someone else, or indeed who exactly received such bequests. It is probable that the reason why some items are not listed is simply because the deceased could not afford them. Weatherill has pointed out that the main omissions from inventories throughout the eighteenth century are textiles, as clothing was not valued in a reliable way,<sup>110</sup> though John Bedell has commented that 'clothes are frequently itemised for the wealthy'.<sup>111</sup> The reason why clothing items are omitted in many inventories could, of course, also be that they were not worth much

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<sup>107</sup> The IR19 series covers from 1796 to 1903. For the details of IR19 series, see L. Hoskins, *Reading the Inventory: Household Goods, Domestic Cultures and Difference in England and Wales, 1841-81* (2011), PhD thesis, University of London.

<sup>108</sup> L. Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain 1660-1760* (1996), 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. The difficulties posed by the absence of probate inventories have been repeatedly noted by Victorian domestic historians. See M. Ponsonby, *Stories from Home: English Domestic Interiors 1750-1850* (Aldershot, 2007), pp. 5-6; R. J. Morris, *Men, Women and Property in England, 1780-1870* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 49.

<sup>109</sup> Before the Married Women's Property Act of 1870, a wife's goods legally belonged to her husband.

<sup>110</sup> Weatherill, *Consumer*, p. 3. Linen was an important fabric in the nineteenth-century household, and it was often separated from wearing apparel in the inventories of the IR19 series.

<sup>111</sup> J. Bedell, 'Archaeology and Probate Inventories in the Study of Eighteenth-Century Life', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 31:2(2000), 223-245(p. 239).

money.<sup>112</sup> Most inventories give a single valuation for ‘wearing apparel’, and only a few of them list clothing items with a separate value or an original price.<sup>113</sup> In spite of these problems, the aim here has been to examine inventories in the context of broader cultural theories of identity as put forward by historians of material culture.

### **The Organisation of the Chapters**

This is the first study to use a wide range of sources to reconstruct a nuanced dress history of English middle-class women in the mid-Victorian period. It also sheds new light on the meaning of clothing-related practices among different age groups of women, and on relations between women and men.

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter One, ‘Dressing like A Lady: Morality and Etiquette’, takes as its starting point the prescriptive literature on women’s dress during c. 1851-75 period, and explores how respectable middle-class women had to dress according to social morals and etiquette. Prescriptive literature provides important insights into Victorians’ dress codes, but it cannot be assumed to reveal contemporary attitude towards dress and fashion. Chapter Two, “‘Simple yet Elegant’: Texts, Images and Surviving Objects”, examines how middle-class women’s magazines used language to construct the world of fashion, how they portrayed female beauty, how women readers reacted to such portrayals of their clothes, and what surviving dresses reveal about the values of mid-Victorian women. The chapter indicates the significance of a close study of documentary and pictorial evidence together with physical objects. However, surviving dresses do not allow us to deduce how they looked when originally worn and how women behaved when wearing them. Chapter Three, ‘Women in Photographs: Communication, Representation and Fashion’, investigates how middle-class women used clothes to create their identities in studio photographs, a powerful new medium which conveyed Victorians’ considerations for their clothing and representation. The chapter is situated within a critique of an understanding of visual culture as well as what clothes signify with regard to different age groups of women.

Chapter Four, ‘Women Sewing at Home: Ideology, Fashion and Expression’, and Chapter Five, ‘A Middle-Class Woman’s Wardrobe: Account Books, Dress Records and Inventories’, then turn to study how middle-class women produced and

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<sup>112</sup> ‘Under civil law a widow’s *bona paraphernalia* (personal items such as her apparel (clothing), bed, jewels and ornaments) were to be excluded from the inventory, but the church courts generally interpreted *bona paraphernalia* as comprising her apparel only’. K. Grannum and N. Taylor (eds.), *Wills and Probate Records: A Guide for Family Historians* (2009), 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., p. 73.

<sup>113</sup> However, the price is sometimes either underestimated or overestimated.

consumed their clothing items as well as communicated and transformed socio-cultural meanings. The former reveals that for middle-class women, domestic sewing was not only a feminine virtue but also a fashionable activity and a means of expression; meanwhile, it examines how advertisers created the link between middle-class women and the sewing machine, as well as critics' views on machine sewing. In the fifth chapter, account books and dress records give a great deal of information as to consumer preference: the purchase of new clothes and the balance of latest fashions with alteration and repair of existing items; inventories establish the existence of value of clothing items in mid-nineteenth century. It is argued that through symbolic dress consumption, middle-class women constructed and maintained their gender, class and social identities. To signify the importance of the relationship between clothes and gender relations in mid-Victorian England, the final chapter, 'Women's Participation in Sport: Dress and Gender Relations', treats sport as a social practice, through which respectable middle-class women had to present their manner and knowledge of the use of sportswear, in accordance with their companions and activities. In conclusion, the thesis makes important contributions to the dress history and material culture of middle-class women in mid-Victorian England.

## Chapter 1

### Dressing like a Lady: Morality and Etiquette

On 10 June 1851, Geraldine Jewsbury wrote a letter to Mrs Jane Carlyle, after attending Mrs ----'s dinner party:

I found a very kind note from Mrs ----, telling me she had made up a little party for me of people she thought I would like to meet. I called at a grand hairdresser's in Regent Street, and had my hair made decent for once in my life, but hardly knew my own face again with the hair brought low down on the cheeks. The muslin dress fitted very well and looked very nice, but it was high in the throat; and even Mrs ---- herself wore a low dress, with nothing but a pearl necklace round her throat. There was another young lady besides -- her daughter -- who was even thinner than myself, and she wore a very low dress; so I felt as if I had gone in a morning wrapper.<sup>1</sup>

Although Geraldine had dressed up for the occasion, putting on a dress that fitted well, the high-throated style made her feel uncomfortable when she compared it to the low-cut dresses other women were wearing. This letter shows that she was aware that her dress might not have been the most suitable choice for a dinner party, raising the questions of what style of dress might have been more acceptable and whether a dress worn by a guest should be different from that worn by the hostess, as well as drawing attention to the differences between the dresses worn by young, middle-aged and older women, in accordance with mid-Victorian social decorum.

In earlier studies of nineteenth-century dress, the psychologist John C. Flugel and the dress historians Cecil W. Cunnington and James Laver have argued that sexual attraction was the key function of women's clothing, but this interpretation does not fit well with the social and cultural context of mid-Victorian England.<sup>2</sup> Given that Evangelicalism reached the peak of its social and spiritual influence in the 1850s and 1860s, it is surely undeniable that Christianity played an important role in middle-class women's lives during the mid-Victorian period.<sup>3</sup> Social and gender historians of the nineteenth century, on the other hand, have undertaken a deeper analysis of gender, economics and the lives of the middle classes through the use of archival documents, though they tend to ignore the important connections between clothes, identity, and

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<sup>1</sup> Ireland (ed.), *Jewsbury to Carlyle*, p. 408, B&I:S4830-D115.

<sup>2</sup> J. C. Flugel, *The Psychology of Clothes* (1930); C. W. Cunnington, *The Art of English Costume* (1949); idem, *The Perfect Lady* (1948); idem, *Why Women Wear Clothes* (1941), pp. 41-76; idem, *Feminine Attitudes in the Nineteenth Century* (1935), p. 10; J. Laver, *Modesty in Dress: An Inquiry into the Fundamentals of Fashion* (1969), p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> P. Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford, 1996), p. 20. *Female Happiness* stated that 'religion is an indispensable item in female education; no woman can adequately fulfil her social duties without being religious'. [Anon.], *Female Happiness: or, the Lady's Handbook of Life* (1854), with Preface by J. E. Cox, p. 53.



various issues related to morality and etiquette in middle-class women, and in addition they did not generally study real objects. *The Best Circles* (1973/1986), by Leonore Davidoff, for example, discusses the social life and contacts of upper-class ladies in Victorian and Edwardian England, while *Family Fortunes* by Davidoff and Hall argues that Christianity helped women to demonstrate their femininity by serving their family at home.<sup>4</sup> In *Dress and Morality* (1986/2003), Aileen Ribeiro argues that the prism of morality has throughout history changed the way English people have dressed, but gives little consideration to how the middle classes have represented themselves, given that her case studies are based on elite high fashion.<sup>5</sup>

This chapter therefore aims to integrate issues of morality and identity with the clothes that were actually worn, arguing that, in order to be respectable, mid-Victorian middle-class women had to dress in accordance with social morality and etiquette, given that outward appearance was considered as representative of the inward character and decorum of the wearer. The chapter is divided into three sections, the first of which is concerned with how Christianity formed the basis for the construction of the image of the ideal middle-class woman, the ‘Angel in the House’, how such an ideal woman was expected to dress in her daily life, and how clothing reflected her morality and gender identity. The second section, on the other hand, considers how clothes expressed the social and marital status and age of a respectable middle-class woman, and the final section discusses that she also had to dress according to the time, season and occasion.

The sources analysed here are over 63 advice manuals, published in both England and America and to be found in the BL, and nearly a hundred articles dating from between 1836 and 1876, taken from GD, as well as three articles and a cartoon taken from Australian publications. The reason for this is that America, the older colony, had a system of etiquette similar to that of England, while Australia, the younger one, had imported English etiquette and manners.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, in the absence of strict copyright laws, many advice articles were printed again and again in different publications. *Beeton’s Complete Etiquette for Ladies* (1876), for example, seemed merely to involve a change of title from *The Etiquette of the Toilette-Table* (1859), as

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<sup>4</sup> L. Davidoff, *The Best Circles: Society Etiquette and the Season* (1986), with A New Introduction by V. Glendinning 2<sup>nd</sup> edn.; Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*. Recently, *Household Gods* (2006) by Deborah Cohen has contended that domestic interiors reflected the morality and religion of mid-Victorian British middle classes. D. Cohen, *Household Gods: the British and their Possession* (2006), ch. 1, pp. 1-31.

<sup>5</sup> A. Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality* (2003), 2<sup>nd</sup> edn.

<sup>6</sup> Davidoff, *Best Circles*, p. 101.

the contents were almost identical.<sup>7</sup> Certain popular books of etiquette, such as *Hints on Etiquette and the Usages of Society* and *The Habit of Good Society*, saw the publication of several editions during those 25 years. In *Displaying Designs for the Domestic Interior in Europe and America, 1850-1950*, Jeremy Aynsley argues that at the time interior magazines circulated on an international level, and ‘some articles were syndicated, allowing them to appear in more than one context, sometimes with different illustrations, crossing the Atlantic in both directions to reach wider readerships’.<sup>8</sup> This phenomenon also applied at the time to prescriptive literature, women’s magazines, and fashion articles and illustrations.

Advice manuals, the price of which ranged from sixpence to four shillings, were aimed at the middle classes, the members of which were eager to combine their wealth and success with respectability, and were in wide circulation during the mid-Victorian period.<sup>9</sup> They were often published in a pocket-sized format so that people could carry them around wherever they went and consult them, to ensure that they acted accordingly on every occasion. Michael Curtin points out that not only women of the leisured class, ‘who had the time, money, inclination, and social sanction to pursue active extra-domestic sociability’, but also middle-class women who were ‘determined to live up to the expectations of their class’ were considered to be the target audience for books of etiquette.<sup>10</sup> Advice manuals are often addressed to a ‘lady’, who was not necessarily born into the nobility, but who tended to ‘behave in a superior manner’ or wanted to be raised to the rank of a lady.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, they were not only written by men but also by women, such as the *Book of Household Management* (1861) by Mrs Isabella Beeton (1836-65), and *How I Managed My House on Two Hundred Pounds* (1864) by Mrs Eliza Warren (1810-1900).<sup>12</sup> Many of these manuals were

<sup>7</sup> S. Beeton, *Beeton's Complete Etiquette for Ladies: A Guide to Visiting, Entertaining, and Travelling, with Hints on Courtship, Marriage, and Dress* (1876).

<sup>8</sup> J. Aynsley, ‘Displaying Designs for the Domestic Interior in Europe and America, 1850-1950’, in idem and C. Grant (eds.), *Imagined Interiors* (2006), pp. 190-215 (p. 199).

<sup>9</sup> M. Morgan, *Manners, Morals and Class in England, 1774-1858* (Basingstoke, 1994), p. 21.

<sup>10</sup> M. Curtin, *Propriety and Position: A Study of Victorian Manners* (New York, 1987), pp. 194, 208-209, 215.

<sup>11</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, (hereafter *OED*),

<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/105012?rskey=71ty3J&result=2&isAdvanced=false#eid>> [accessed 27 November 2012]

<sup>12</sup> 30,000 copies of *Book of Household Management* were sold in three years. *How I Managed My House* sold 36,000 copies in its first year. R. D. Altick, ‘Nineteenth-Century English Best-Sellers: A Third List Authors’, *Studies in Bibliography*, 39(1986), 235-241 (p. 240); Branca, *Sisterhood*, p. 13. Isabella was the wife of an English publisher Samuel Beeton (1831-77). Eliza married Walter Warren in 1835, and became a widow in 1844, remarrying Frederic Francis in 1851 (he was to die in turn, in 1856). ‘Mrs Warren’ continued to be popular, because she had published many needlework and household management manuals and built up her reputation since the 1840s. She was also the editor of *The Ladies' Treasury* (1858-95) (hereafter *LT*).

published anonymously, under names like ‘a Lady’, ‘an English Lady and Gentleman’ and ‘an Officer’s Widow’, which aimed to add a note of authority.<sup>13</sup>

Marjorie Morgan points out that ‘etiquette books consisted of a set of precise prescriptions to be learned concerning what one should and should not do - not whom one should strive to be’, but Amanda Vickery reminds us that the reason so many advice books appeared in the Victorian period was because writers were reacting to people’s bad behaviour, rather than because many people followed them.<sup>14</sup> To redress such an imbalance, in addition to the advice manuals this chapter also takes into consideration Victorian women’s letters, diaries and novels, which provide an understanding of how the social lives of middle-class women and their clothes functioned within this context. Cartoons, too, show the viewpoints of contemporary commentators as regards women’s dress, and surviving dresses, which provide important clues as to the tastes of Victorian women, are also examined here.

### **Dress and Moral Values**

According to the Bible, when God created woman, he said to her that ‘your desire will be for your husband, and he will be your master’ (Genesis 3:16). A woman’s most natural and important role was considered to be as a wife and a mother, and the home was regarded as the sacred place for the Victorian woman.<sup>15</sup> Though the theory of separate spheres has been critiqued by many historians, Christianity remained an essential feature of mid-nineteenth-century literature, and as such deeply affected the values and behaviour of the mid-Victorians, as well as the representation of femininity.<sup>16</sup> This section aims to explore how Christian beliefs influenced the way such an ideal woman would dress, and what clothes best represented her morality and gender identity.

The famous writer on moral instruction for women, Sarah Stickney Ellis (1799-1872) — who was born in a Quaker family and was married to Rev. William Ellis (1794-1872), a member of the London Missionary Society — believed that middle-class women had to apply their moral powers to the education of their children, to supporting the views of their husbands and to helping the poor.<sup>17</sup> In the influential

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<sup>13</sup> ‘A Lady’, *A Manual of Etiquette for Ladies: Or True Principles of Politeness* (1856); ‘An Officer’s Widow’, *The Etiquette of the Toilette-Table* (1859).

<sup>14</sup> Morgan, *Manners*, p. 23; Vickery, ‘Golden Age’.

<sup>15</sup> Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 114.

<sup>16</sup> On the debates regarding separate spheres, see Introduction, p. 26.

<sup>17</sup> S. S. Ellis, *The Wives of England: their Relative Duties, Domestic Influence, and Social Obligations* (1843); idem, *The Mothers of England: their Influence and Responsibility* (1843); idem, *The Daughters*

series of poems *The Angel in the House* (1854-62), Coventry Patmore (1823-96) portrayed his first wife Emily Andrews (1824-62) as an angel, a perfect model for all women, and declared that a moral wife in the biblical sense should be both selfless and submissive to her husband.<sup>18</sup> In *Sesame and Lilies* (1865), the art critic John Ruskin (1819-1900) argued that:

the woman's power is for rule, not for battle, — and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for sweet ordering, arrangement, and decision. She sees the qualities of things, their claims, and their places... By her office, and place [home], she is protected from all danger and temptation.<sup>19</sup>

Ruskin went on to comment that a woman had to 'sympathise in her husband's pleasures'.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, many contemporary novelists, such as Charles Dickens (1812-70), George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell, often applied the ideals of the angel and the fallen woman to their characters.<sup>21</sup> In the context of such expectations weighing on middle-class women, what most historians have not looked into is how this Christian cult of femininity was not only represented in Victorian literature, but also how it influenced the way middle-class women actually dressed.

For middle-class women, simplicity and cleanliness were the primary moral values in terms of dress.<sup>22</sup> Robert Kemp Philp (1819-82), a publisher of popular literature, stated that a simple style of dress was an indication of modesty.<sup>23</sup> Dressing simply made it impossible for other people to be given an impression of immodesty, or of the wearer being fascinated by rich materials or decorations.<sup>24</sup> In 1873, *The Australian Journal* claimed that 'the great things to be aimed at are freshness and

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*of England: their Position in Society, Character and Responsibilities* (1842). For Ellis's life, see Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp. 182-185.

<sup>18</sup> J. Carré, *The Crisis of Courtesy: Studies in the Conduct-Book in Britain, 1600-1900* (Leiden, 1994), p. 145.

<sup>19</sup> G. E. Hollingworth (ed.), *Sesame and Lilies* (1932), p. 61.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>21</sup> For fallen women in Victorian novels, see G. H. Bamhill, *Fallen Angels: Female Wrongdoing in Victorian Novels* (Lethbridge, 2005); D. A. Logan, *Fallenness in Victorian Women's Writing: Marry, Stitch, Die, or Do Worse* (1998); T. Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891); M. Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862); G. Eliot, *Adam Bede* (1859); E. Gaskell, *Ruth* (1853); C. Dickens, *Oliver Twist* or, *the Parish Boy's Progress* (1837). For Victorian women novelists using male pseudonyms, see C. A. Judd, 'Male Pseudonyms and Female Authority in Victorian England', in J. O. Jordan and R. L. Patten (eds.), *Literature in the Marketplace: Nineteenth-Century British Publishing and the Circulation of Books* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 250-268.

<sup>22</sup> [Anon.], *The Lady's Manual of Modern Etiquette* (1864), p. 1; 'Simplicity of Dress', *The Australian Journal* (Melbourne, Australia), 30 December 1865, Issue 18, p. 285, GD:CC1904099196; 'The Ladies' Page: The Common-Sense of Dress', *Ibid.*, 1 November 1872, Issue 90, p. 164, GD:CC1903256872.

<sup>23</sup> R. K. Philp, *The Lady's Every-Day Book: A Practical Guide in the Elegant Arts and Daily Difficulties of Domestic Life* (1873), p. 309.

<sup>24</sup> *Lady's Manual*, p. 3. It is important to bear in mind the fact that, for the Victorians, 'simplicity' did not necessarily mean a plain dress without any trimmings. 'Simplicity' depended on the social position, marital status and age of the wearer and on the specific occasion, and so a dress could still contain a certain degree of rich decoration. The concept of 'simplicity' was in some sense related to adaptability.

simplicity; in children the simplicity of innocence, and in old age the simplicity of gravity'.<sup>25</sup> This concept of simplicity was derived from the Bible: in the beginning, God created Adam and Eve, 'who were both naked, and were not ashamed' (Genesis 2:25), though after disobeying God's command and eating the fruit of the tree of the 'knowledge of good and evil', 'their eyes were open and they were conscious that they had no clothing, and they made themselves coats of leaves stitched together' (Genesis 3:7). Before expelling them from the Garden of Eden, God made Adam and Eve clothes of animal skins, which were chosen to protect their bodies and cover their sins. For Christians, therefore, 'dress was for *convenience and use*, and not for ornamental purposes', and so the important thing was that it should be made out of strong materials rather than in a particular style.<sup>26</sup> Wearing highly-decorated clothing or costly jewellery was also thought to be immodest and to provide an incentive for sin. Nevertheless, different Christian groups had different regulations regarding their lifestyle and appearance, just as they had different ways of reading and interpreting the meanings of the Bible.<sup>27</sup>

The dress of Quakers, for example, was more concerned with neatness and primness than that of other Christian groups.<sup>28</sup> Quakers believed that dresses had to be made out of simple, strong fabrics, though they did not have to be unshapely in terms of cut.<sup>29</sup> According to the New Testament, 'women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array' (1 Timothy 2:9). Plain and prim dress signified the religious values of humility,

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<sup>25</sup> 'Taste and Fashion in Feminine Attire', *The Australian Journal*, 1 January 1873, Issue 92, p. 276, GD:CC1903257011. 'Freshness' referred to cleanliness and also to the condition of being 'fresh' in terms of sensibility. For cleanliness, see below, pp. 50-51. For the condition of 'freshness' in terms of sensibility, see Chapter 2, pp. 82, 88.

<sup>26</sup> Cited in E. Miles, *Quaker Difficulties: Oaths, Lies, Man and Woman Worship, Discipline, Dress, Woman's Preaching, Missionaries, Marriage, War, &c* (1859), p. 24; also see *Ibid.*, pp. 43, 44; *Female Happiness*, p. 281.

<sup>27</sup> The Church of England placed an emphasis on church services. Evangelicals, on the other hand, concentrated on a serious Christian life, personal morality, philanthropic work and individual Bible reading, while Nonconformists focused on teaching people 'how to work hard and have faith in their own ability'. The upper class and professional middle classes often attended the Church of England, while the business and manufacturing middle classes and the skilled working class were more likely to have been Nonconformists or Protestants who did not belong to the Church of England, including Baptists, Congregationalists, Methodists, Quakers and Unitarians. 'In some country villages in the North there was a Roman Catholic squire'. S. Mitchell, *Daily Life in Victorian England* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 245-248. Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp. 73-192; J. Perkin, *Victorian Women* (1993), pp. 100-101. For details on how different Christian groups read the Bible, see T. Larsen, *A People of One Book: the Bible and the Victorians* (Oxford, 2011).

<sup>28</sup> *Female Happiness*, p. 284. For the lives of Quaker women, see S. S. Holton, *Quaker Women: Personal Life, Memory and Radicalism in the Lives of Women Friends, 1800-1920* (2007).

<sup>29</sup> T. Clarkson, *A Portraiture of Quakerism 3 Volumes in 1* (Teddington, 2006), pp. 88-89.

piety, and sincerity.<sup>30</sup> The well-known Quaker Elizabeth Fry (1780-1845), for example, often wore a set of prim clothes, and while drab dress and a ‘coal scuttle bonnet’ were not the essential apparel of a philanthropic spirit, she did set a fashion for Quakers.<sup>31</sup> Samuel Beeton commented that narrow-minded religious fanatics persuaded women to be indifferent to dress: the unadorned plainness of a dress was thought to ‘prevent them from attaching any importance to their outward appearance’, given that an ideal woman was required instead to spend her time decorating the house and on her children’s dress.<sup>32</sup>

The founder of the Society of Friends, George Fox (1624-91), argued that for reasons of economy, an effect of simplicity could be produced by not dying cloth.<sup>33</sup> Plain colours, such as greys and browns, soon became common among the Quakers.<sup>34</sup> These arguments continued to influence nineteenth-century Quakers. In 1853, for example, a Quaker bride, Marian Richardson (née Wakefield), chose to wear a simple grey dress with a grey bonnet on her wedding day in Ballitore, Ireland.<sup>35</sup> John Harvey argues that grey ‘was a further un-coloured colour the Victorians valued. It was a virtuous colour, associated in Christian use with faithful conjugality of doves’.<sup>36</sup> In *Middlemarch* (1874), George Eliot also used a grey dress to signify the moral seriousness of the idealistic heroine Dorothea Brooke.<sup>37</sup> In 1860, Henry P. Willis, an American author of etiquette, claimed that “the young Quakers and Quakeresses of the present day conform to the usage of society in this respect except in the matter of ‘finery’. Their dresses, and even their hats and bonnets, approach very near to the

<sup>30</sup> Miles, *Quaker Difficulties*, p. 24; J. W. Frost, ‘From Plainness to Simplicity: Changing Quaker Ideals for Material Culture’, in E. J. Lapsansky and A. A. Verplanck (eds.), *Quaker Aesthetics: Reflections on A Quaker Ethic in American Design and Consumption, 1720-1920* (Pennsylvania, 2002), pp. 16-42(p. 19).

<sup>31</sup> [Anon.], *The Illustrated Manners Book: A Manual of Good Behavior and Polite Accomplishments* (New York, 1855), pp. 452-453.

<sup>32</sup> Beeton, *Etiquette*, p. 112; [Anon.], *The Hand-Book of Etiquette: Being A Complete Guide to the Usages of Polite Society* (1873), p. 9. An article published in *LT*, in 1869, commented that ‘Englishwomen attach less importance to dress than their sisters in America or France. They like to look very well at home rather than to make a great show out of doors. [...] An Englishwoman’s home is generally the model of everything which a home should be. Her own rooms are beautifully arranged, and filled with evidences of an accomplished taste. Her children are dressed charmingly’. ‘The Dress of English-Women from *the Pall Mall Gazette*’, *LT*, 1 April 1868, GD:DX1901526328. *LT* was a monthly that cost 9d., and was aimed at middle-class and lower middle-class women, with its key rival being *EDM*.

<sup>33</sup> [Anon.], *Observations of the Quaker-Peculiarities of Dress and Language* (1836), p. 3. It cost one shilling.

<sup>34</sup> A. M. Gummere, *The Quaker: A Study in Costume* (1968), pp. 30-31.

<sup>35</sup> *Ballitore Library & Quaker Museum*,

<[http://www.discoverireland.com/cn/ireland-things-to-see-and-do/listings/product/?fid=FI\\_13670](http://www.discoverireland.com/cn/ireland-things-to-see-and-do/listings/product/?fid=FI_13670)> [accessed 12 October 2012]

<sup>36</sup> Harvey, *Men in Black*, p. 212.

<sup>37</sup> The setting of the story is in the fictitious town Middlemarch, during the period between 1830 and 1832. Also see S. Keen, ‘Quaker Dress, Sexuality, and the Domestication of Reform in the Victorian Novel’, *Victorian Literature and Cultural*, 30:1(2002), 211-236.

fashionable styles”.<sup>38</sup> F. M. L. Thompson argues that, by the 1860s, ‘the simplicity and rigour of the way of life were everywhere eroded by worldliness’.<sup>39</sup> Though the fashionable dresses of the 1870s were often decorated with pleats, flounces or frills on the skirt, Figure 1-1, for example, shows a Quaker woman’s dress, made up of a simple grey silk bodice and sage green silk skirt. For most Victorians, the idealised image of the middle-class woman was still based on the iconic figure of the angel, so their clothing and values were inevitably in line with Christian beliefs. Women’s dress was thus supposed to be not only simple, but also clean and neat, because modesty was the fundamental nature of woman and the true and lasting ornament of the female character.<sup>40</sup> Otherwise, a woman would be in danger of sinking ‘from a goddess to a fallen angel’.<sup>41</sup>



Fig. 1-1 The Grey Quaker Dress (1873-77), MCG:1979.3/1.

A woman’s dress and appearance had to be clean and neat, and she should never appear in a soiled or worn dress or with unbrushed hair.<sup>42</sup> As Willis pointed out, ‘it is far better to dress coarsely and out of fashion and be strictly clean, than to cover a

<sup>38</sup> H. P. Willis, *Etiquette and the Usages of Society: Containing the Most Approved Rules for Correct Deportment in Fashionable Life, Together with Hints to Gentlemen and Ladies on Irregular and Vulgar Habits. Also the Etiquette of Love and Courtship, Marriage Etiquette, Etc* (New York, 1860), p. 39.

<sup>39</sup> F. M. L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society: A Social History of Victorian Britain 1830-1900* (1988), p. 255.

<sup>40</sup> [Anon.], *Etiquette for Ladies and Gentlemen, or, The Principles of True Politeness* (Halifax, 1853), p. 110.

<sup>41</sup> [Anon.], *The Young Lady’s Book of Advice and Instruction* (Glasgow, 1859), p. 13.

<sup>42</sup> *Hand-Book of Etiquette*, p. 9; F. Urban, *The First Book of Manners, or Introduction to Polite Behavior* (1856), p. 72.

dirty skin with the finest and richest clothing'.<sup>43</sup> He continued by arguing that a tidy wife was more attractive than a woman wearing an expensive silk dress, as far as a husband was concerned.<sup>44</sup> According to manuals such as *The Lady's Manual of Modern Etiquette*, *Etiquette for Ladies* and *How to Dress*, clear eyes, clean teeth, smooth skin and refined white hands with slender straight fingers and transparent nails, as well as well-scrubbed feet, were not only evidence of hygiene, health and beauty, but also of moral quality and self-respect.<sup>45</sup> *Etiquette for Ladies and Gentlemen* (c. 1850) revealed that 'cleanliness is a prominent feature in the appearance... A disregard for cleanliness is a direct insult to society, and is a certain indication of filthy habits and a vulgar education'.<sup>46</sup>

In addition to a moral value, cleanliness was an indicator of a person's social status. In an enquiry published in the weekly newspaper *The Queen; An Illustrated Journal and Review* (1861-1970) (hereafter *Queen*) on 13 February 1875, 'Harfra' asked a question:

gardening, drawing, writing, and living in a town, make it impossible for me to keep my hands as clean as I should wish. Can any lady recommend something to add to the soap and water to increase their cleansing action?<sup>47</sup>

In the following issues, several answers were offered by readers, showing that some Victorian upper and middle-class women tried hard to keep themselves clean to satisfy moral codes, and that they liked to share household cleaning tips with each other.<sup>48</sup> Taking a bath or keeping one's clothes clean was not an easy job for the middle classes in the Victorian period, and it was even harder for the working classes.<sup>49</sup> Women had to keep their underclothes as clean as their dresses, too, even if such hidden items were never to be seen by anybody else. These underclothes, which had to be frequently

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<sup>43</sup> Willis, *Etiquette*, p. 38.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 106-107.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38; *Lady's Manual*, p. 47; [Anon.], *Etiquette for Ladies; Being A Manual of Minor Social Ethics and Customary Observances* (1857), p. 8; [Anon.], *How to Dress; or, Etiquette of the Toilette* (1876), pp. 55-58 (hereafter *How to Dress I*).

<sup>46</sup> J. Ashelford, *The Art of Dress: Clothes and Society, 1500-1914* (1996), p. 216.

<sup>47</sup> 'Notes and Queries on Dress', *Queen*, 13 February 1875, p. 111. It cost 6d., and was a popular periodical for upper or upper-middle-class women.

<sup>48</sup> 'Answers', *Ibid.*, 20 February 1875, p. 127; *Ibid.*, 27 February 1875, p. 127. Not many dresses were made of washable materials, so women had to learn how to remove stains and smells from their clothing. In addition, 'clean linen was considered the best means to absorb and remove sweat, dirt and other life-threatening impurities'. J. Styles, *The Dress of the People: Everyday Fashion in Eighteenth-Century England* (2007), p. 78.

<sup>49</sup> Before indoor plumbing, water often had to be carried over long distances. Some items needed to be washed in boiling water. Clothes were then hung out to dry and were starched before being ironed. Doing the laundry was a long and arduous process, which could take anything from a few hours to a whole day. C. Walkley and V. Foster, *Crinolines and Crimping Irons: Victorian Clothes: How They Were Cleaned and Cared for* (1978), pp. 59-60.



washed, needed to be made from strong and durable materials, but on the other hand coarse underclothes signified humble status and poor taste on the part of the wearer.<sup>50</sup> Dirty underclothes were of course neither hygienic nor pleasant to wear next to the skin, and, as John Styles comments, looking after one's underclothes was a way of looking after the body.<sup>51</sup>

Christian beliefs also built up a strict gender ideology in the Victorian period, whereby dress was used to construct the behaviour and role of both sexes. According to Victorian conduct literature, a corset was worn to support a woman's body and to provide a good figure and elegant posture, while layers of petticoats or crinoline obliged her to slow her walking pace and thus move gracefully.<sup>52</sup> The ideal meek woman naturally required the support of a male arm.<sup>53</sup> Conversely, poor and working-class women were unable to gain social respect because of their coarse and robust bodies, as well as their free and impudent gait, which was perceived as having a damaging effect on their femininity.<sup>54</sup> This explains why, for their 'Sunday best' dress, working-class women would often wear a home-made corset with a crinoline.<sup>55</sup>

Helene E. Roberts argues that Victorian male dress emphasised masculinity, while female dress aimed to create an ultra-feminine image: men were serious (they wore dark colours and little ornamentation), and women were frivolous (wearing light pastel colours, ribbons and bows); men were active (their clothes allowed them to move freely), while women were inactive (theirs inhibited movement); men were strong (their clothes emphasised broad chests and shoulders), whereas women were delicate (their clothing accentuating tiny waists, sloping shoulders and a softly-rounded silhouette); men were aggressive (their clothing had sharp, well-defined lines and a clearly-defined silhouette), and women submissive (their silhouette was undefined and their clothing constricting).<sup>56</sup> While it is clear that Victorian women's clothes had to project such feminine characteristics, the dress of a respectable woman was also supposed not to

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<sup>50</sup> [Anon.], *How to Behave: A Pocket Manual of Etiquette, and Guide to Correct Personal Habits, Etc* (Glasgow, 1865) (hereafter *How to Behave I*), p. 34.

<sup>51</sup> Styles, *Dress*, p. 78.

<sup>52</sup> Owing to changes in gender ideology, ways of dressing have changed over time. Women in the Regency period, for example, were never required to wear a corset and petticoat.

<sup>53</sup> *Hand-Book of Etiquette*, p. 8. Owing to differences in etiquette, English women were able to accept the arm of a gentleman while walking, but their French and American counterparts were not allowed to. For details on corsets, see V. Steele, *The Corset: A Cultural History* (2001).

<sup>54</sup> H. F. Tucker (ed.), *A Companion to Victorian Literature & Culture* (Oxford, 2002), p. 410.

<sup>55</sup> L. Summers, 'Yes, They Did Wear Them: Working-Class Women and Corsetry in the Nineteenth Century', *Costume*, 36(2002), 65-74(p. 66). For poor women wearing stays in the eighteenth century, see Styles, *Dress*, pp. 42-43. For a servant wearing crinoline to be photographed, see Chapter 3, p. 149.

<sup>56</sup> H. E. Roberts, 'The Exquisite Slave: The Role of Clothes in the Marking of the Victorian Woman', *Signs*, 2:3(1977), 554-569(p. 555).

hamper her health and movement and to help her to perform well in a range of different social situations, and not every woman was obliged to represent bashful femininity, or indeed to show off a tight waistline, as we shall see in the course of this thesis.<sup>57</sup>

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Fig. 1-2 'Bloomerism', *Punch*, 1851, p. 189, GD:DX1901574577.

These hierarchical dress codes were challenged by the emergence of the 'Bloomer' dress. This garment, promoted by the American women's rights advocate Amelia Jenks Bloomer (1818-94) in 1851, consisted of Turkish-style trousers fastened at the ankle and worn under a short skirt. Though the Bloomer dress was claimed to be healthier, safer and more comfortable than layers of petticoats, it was never widely accepted during the nineteenth century.<sup>58</sup> The Bloomer dress was regarded as being

<sup>57</sup> The senior curator Edwina Ehrman has argued that in private Victorian men were very colourful in their tastes.

<sup>58</sup> From the 1850s onwards, the Dress Reform and Artistic Dress (anti-fashion) movements gradually spread throughout England. Artistic Dress was inspired by the style of the Middle Ages and influenced by the members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. Such dress emphasised natural beauty, in opposition to corsets, crinolines and bustles, as well as luxurious ornamentation and bright aniline dyes. Though Artistic (and later Aesthetic) Dress was never accepted by the majority of mid-Victorian middle-class women, it had nevertheless spread to America and France by the end of the nineteenth century. The Rational Dress Society was established in 1881 by Lady Harberton (1843-1911) and Mrs Emily M. King, and its ideas were adopted for cycling costume in the late nineteenth century. Women did wear trousers during the World Wars, but it was only in the 1970s that trousers became acceptable clothing for women. On Dress Reform and Artistic Dress movements, see B. G. Smith (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Women in World History, Vol. 4* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 111-112; P. A. Cunningham, *Reforming Women's Fashion, 1850-1920: Politics, Health, and Art* (Kent, 2002); S. Levitt, 'From Mrs Bloomer to the Bloomer: The Social Significance of the Nineteenth-Century English Dress Reform Movement', *Textile History*, 24:1(1993), 27-37; S. M. Newton, *Health, Art and Reason: Dress Reformers of the Nineteenth*

part of a female social movement which defied the Christian idealised image of the 'Angel in the House', and was also thought to be immoral because so masculine an appearance was an attack on femininity. In a cartoon from *Punch* called 'Bloomerism', the gender roles have been inverted (Figure 1-2): a woman who wears the Bloomer dress acts as if she were a man, and suggests that her husband Alfred, who is lying on the sofa reading a 'foolish novel' (like a woman), should do something 'rational', complaining that he does not play the piano anymore now that he is married.<sup>59</sup> This cartoon satirised women who wore the Bloomer dress, which was considered unwomanly and lacking in gentleness. It is clear from this that dress and accessories did indeed represent the gender identity and morality of the wearer.

The essential requirement of dress was to define Victorian women's morality and modesty. Lady W. Russell (1793-1874), the wife of Lord George William Russell (1790-1846), remarked in 1862 that 'the English conclude if your dress is loose, that your morals are so'.<sup>60</sup> Wearing a corset was regarded as an expression of self-discipline and a symbol of a woman's respectability. A woman who did not restrict her physical body was considered to be incapable of moral restraint. However, it was immoral to wear too tight a corset because this would reveal the shape of the body and attract too much attention.<sup>61</sup> Putting too much stress on the flesh was also known to be harmful to health, and it was seen as harmful for women to be laced up too tightly: 'little girls should not wear bones or steels until they had done growing'.<sup>62</sup> *The Lady's Manual* declared that a modest woman should wear a proper size of dress and the correct accessories, and *Etiquette for Ladies* argued that the essentials of dress were, in order of importance, healthfulness, comfort, usefulness and beauty.<sup>63</sup>

Dress also expressed the wearer's ability to fashion an image of the self and to make the right moral decisions. A cartoon from *Melbourne Punch* (1855-1925) in 1873 (Figure 1-3) shows binary opposites to satirise women's clothing. The sitting woman

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*Century* (1974). On artistic dress, see Ribeiro, 'On Englishness in Dress', pp. 23-24; on trousers for women, see, S. Pendergast and T. Pendergast (eds.), *Fashion, Costume and Culture: Clothing, Headwear, Body Decorations, and Footwear through the Ages, Vol. 4: 1900-1945* (2004), p. 808.

<sup>59</sup> Middle-class women were encouraged to play the piano. The wife of Charles Darwin Emma Wedgwood (1808-96), for example, played the piano almost every day. 'New pianos ranged in price from £28 to £120, depending on the size and ornamentation', and second-hand ones started at £12. Branca, *Sisterhood*, p. 53.

<sup>60</sup> J. A. D. G. Ross (ed.), *Three Generations of English Women: Memoirs and Correspondence of Mrs John Taylor, Mrs Sarah Taylor Austin, and Lady Duff Gordon, Vol. 2* (1888), p. 127, B&I:S5168-D096.

<sup>61</sup> *Hand-Book of Etiquette*, p. 9.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8; *Lady's Manual*, p. 45; [Anon.], *The Habits of Good Society: A Handbook of Etiquette* (1859), p. 172. By the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century, the spiral steel corset had been introduced.

<sup>63</sup> *Lady's Manual*, p. 46; *Etiquette for Ladies*, p. 18. Shoes which were too small caused corns on the feet. Tight necklaces, bracelets and jewellery, meanwhile, presented an image of suffocation. *Hand-Book of Etiquette*, p. 10; *Etiquette for Ladies*, p. 16.

(Emily) wears white, symbolising her virtue as the ‘Angel in the House’. She is seated near a table on which there is a book, pen and ink, to indicate that she is an educated woman and knows how to act and dress in a moral way. The standing woman (Agnes), on the other hand, wears black and holds a parasol like a witch’s broom, symbolising her vulgarity. Emily asks Agnes why she has not sat down since she came in, and Agnes replies that her dress is too tight for her to sit down. This conversation suggests that Agnes did not know how to choose a suitable dress for herself, instead blindly following the dictates of fashion, which harmed her body and also made her behave in an improper manner.<sup>64</sup>

Permission to use this image not granted.

Fig. 1-3 ‘The Tight Dress of the Period’, *Melbourne Punch*, 3 April 1873, Issue 923, p. 108, GD:CC1903368538.

Dressing in a crinoline or bustle could also create a distance between women ‘and the approaching men, as if women were unassailable and untouchable’.<sup>65</sup> However, it was thought to be immoral to wear an exaggerated crinoline because it not only hampered a woman’s ability to walk and others’ movements, but it also caused a number of accidents. The English writer Lady Dorothy Nevill (1826-1913) reported how she stood dangerously near a fire when wearing a crinoline:

somehow or other my voluminous dress caught fire, and in an instant I was a blaze, but kept my head, and rolling myself in the hearthrug, by some means or other beat out and subdued the flames...None of the ladies present could do

<sup>64</sup> *Melbourne Punch*, 3 April 1873, Issue 923, p. 108, GD:CC1903368538.

<sup>65</sup> Byrde, *Fashion*, p. 21.

much to assist me, for their enormous crinolines rendered them almost completely impotent to deal with fire, and had they come very close to me, all of them would have been in a blaze, too.<sup>66</sup>

Many cartoons were published at this time satirising such ‘immoral’ women. A cartoon from *Punch* in 1856, entitled ‘Crinoline Convenient Sometimes: A Warning to Mothers’, shows a mother entering her daughter Clara’s room after hearing a noise, and asking her who made the noise. Clara replies that only her and her pet (Moustache) were there, but in fact there is a man hidden behind her exaggerated crinoline (Figure 1-4).<sup>67</sup> Though such a situation might not reflect reality, the satire reinforced the idea that if young women were extravagant and ostentatious in matters of dress, they might also be morally reprehensible in their sexual behaviour.

Permission to use this image not granted.

Fig. 1-4 ‘Crinoline Convenient Sometimes’, *Punch*, 4 October 1856, p. 131, GD:DX1901539695.

It was considered immoral for a woman to uncover her bosom, back, hands or legs, and a respectable woman was thus inevitably a desexualised one.<sup>68</sup> A pair of gloves was regarded as a necessary accessory for the completion of a Victorian outfit.<sup>69</sup> A woman was never to be seen in a public place, such as a church, theatre, lecture room or ballroom, without a pair of gloves, and only the dinner table was excepted from

<sup>66</sup> Perkin, *Victorian Women*, p. 96.

<sup>67</sup> *Punch*, 4 October 1856, p. 131, GD:DX1901539695.

<sup>68</sup> *How to Behave I*, p. 31. A woman’s bathing and swimming outfits had to cover almost as much of her body as regular dresses. On women bathing and swimming, see Chapter 6, pp. 238-248.

<sup>69</sup> ‘A Lady’, *Manual*, p. 13.

this.<sup>70</sup> It was considered modest to wear a high-throated dress, made of thin fabrics, at a summer evening party, and it was immodest to wear a low-cut dress in cold weather.<sup>71</sup> However, *The Hand-Book of Etiquette* declared that though such a custom was propounded by many etiquette books, it never seemed to become popular in England.<sup>72</sup> This was probably because contemporary women's magazines often taught their readers that it was fashionable to wear a low-cut dress in the evening, so some women decided to ignore such etiquette. On 3 August 1864, Frances Elizabeth Owen Cole Monck (c. 1836-1919) commented in her diary that "Mrs ---- was beautifully dressed last night, but her dress was so low at the back that Mr G. said 'You could draw the map of Europe on her back!'"<sup>73</sup> Clearly, Mr G. was criticising the fact that Mrs ---- was showing too much of her skin. Dress etiquette was not a law, though, and it did not guarantee that all women observed decorum in their dress in the same way.<sup>74</sup> In another example, Mrs James Hill (fl. 1843), in a letter to her daughter Miranda Hill (1836-1910) dated 26 February 1860, noted that:

Gertrude, Octavia and Minnie went to a party at Mrs Shaw's. Gertrude and Minnie say Octavia looked 'perfectly lovely'. She had a high white dress, a grand scarlet sash and scarlet net.<sup>75</sup>

Though the letter does not clarify what kind of party Gertrude, Octavia and Minnie were attending, it does suggest that a young unmarried woman Octavia (22) wearing a 'high dress' for parties was a source of delight.<sup>76</sup>

In short, Christian beliefs strongly affected the ideal image of women, and the concept of the 'Angel in the House' and women's moral values expressed simplicity and cleanliness as well as femininity. To be respectable, a woman had to follow not just a code of morality but also dress etiquette, in accordance with her social position, marital status, age, and the occasion, time and season in question.

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*; *Etiquette for Ladies*, p. 15; *Lady's Manual*, p. 46.

<sup>71</sup> *Good Society*, p. 178.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177; *Hand-Book of Etiquette*, p. 10.

<sup>73</sup> F. E. O. C. Monck, *My Canadian Leaves: An Account of A Visit to Canada in 1864-1865* (1891), p. 96, B&I:S677-D004.

<sup>74</sup> Although in the pictures of the German and French painters Franz Xavier Winterhalter (1805-73) and James Tissot (1836-1902) many female sitters wore a *décolletage*, most of these were from the aristocracy and upper class, such as Queen Victoria (1819-1901), the Empress Eugénie (1826-1920) and Alexandra, the Princess of Wales (1844-1925). Christianity was an important matter in a middle-class woman's life, so fashion and etiquette could be quite different from those of the aristocracy and upper class. Furthermore, the examples provided in this chapter are based on evidence from female writers, which could provide a different perspective from that of fashionable women.

<sup>75</sup> O. Hill, *Life of Octavia Hill* (1913), p. 178, B&I:S7466-D138.

<sup>76</sup> The difference between the dress preferences of Mrs ---- and Octavia could be attributed to differences in their age and marital status, what sort of party they were attending, and the season in which the party was held. These two letters are insufficient to conclude whether the majority of women preferred 'high' or 'low' dresses.

## Dress Etiquette and Social Status

*A Manual of Etiquette for Ladies* declared that a woman was considered to ‘live out of the world, and away from the world’s doings’, if she did not follow the principles of etiquette and decency.<sup>77</sup> *The Lady’s Manual* also claimed that ‘there are certain dresses adapted to the different hours of the day, and every lady should study these proprieties of polite life’.<sup>78</sup> This section therefore argues that the ideal dress for a woman had to express her social and marital status, age and decorum.

Dress needed to provide an accurate reflection of the social status of the wearer. In *Sartor Resartus*, Thomas Carlyle argued that ‘clothes were not mere aesthetic ornament, but emblems of society hierarchy and symbols of the spirit’.<sup>79</sup> It was inappropriate for a person to overdress, as overdressing revealed the vanity of the wearer and was considered to be immoral because it did not correspond to her social class.<sup>80</sup> As Mariana Valverde argues, ‘the same dress could be considered elegant and proper on a lady, but showy and dishonest on her maid’.<sup>81</sup>

A wedding dress, for example, often revealed the social status of the mid-Victorian bride. After 10 February 1840, when Queen Victoria wore white silk, satin and Honiton lace to marry Prince Albert, a white wedding dress became popular among the wealthier classes.<sup>82</sup> With a limited budget for clothing, few mid-Victorian middle-class women would have chosen a white dress for their wedding, because it was hard to reuse it for other occasions.<sup>83</sup> Figure 1-5, a white silk taffeta dress, was worn by the surgeon’s daughter Mary Plant for her wedding to the attorney Walter Wren Driffield, at Prescott Parish Church on 12 April 1853. Figure 1-6 shows a cream silk wedding dress with Honiton lace veil, worn by the lace designer Mary Tucker in 1864. As she was a lace designer, it could be argued that Mary had more money for material for her wedding dress compared with other lower middle-class brides. She might have had access to cheaper fabrics by buying directly from manufacturers, and her wedding outfit could also be an excellent advertisement for her work. However, she might have been unable to afford a pure white material: ‘Sylvia’ points out that the colour cream

<sup>77</sup> ‘A Lady’, *Manual*, p. 10.

<sup>78</sup> *Lady’s Manual*, p. 17.

<sup>79</sup> T. Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus* (1896), pp. 27, 40, 49, cited in Roberts, ‘Exquisite Slave’, p. 554.

<sup>80</sup> *The Young Lady’s Book of Advice*, p. 11.

<sup>81</sup> M. Valverde, ‘The Love of Finery: Fashion and the Fallen Woman in Nineteenth-Century Social Discourse’, *Victorian Studies*, 32:2(1989), 169-188(p. 169).

<sup>82</sup> K. Staniland and S. Levey, ‘Queen Victoria’s Wedding Dress and Lace’, *Costume*, 17(1983) 1-32(pp. 1-17).

<sup>83</sup> On wedding dresses, see also Chapter 2, pp. 101-102, 107-108.

was more economical than white.<sup>84</sup> Mary's decision was probably not attributable to economic reasons, however, but was down to the fact that cream was her favourite colour.



Fig. 1-5 The White Wedding Dress, WAG:60.225.19.

Fig. 1-6 The Cream Wedding Dress, RH:98/1963/8/1&2.



In addition to dress, soft, white hands signified a woman's social class,

<sup>84</sup> 'Sylvia', *How to Dress Well on A Shilling A Day: A Ladies' Guide to Home Dressmaking and Millinery* (1876), p. 115.



meaning that she could wear a pair of gloves all the time and that she did not need to carry out heavy-duty labour.<sup>85</sup> An enquiry from *The Lady's Newspaper and Pictorial Times* (1847-63) (hereafter *LN*), on 15 November 1862, asked:

would you be so kind as to inform me of something calculated to improve the colour of the hands - mine are very red and clumsy. Would practising the piano tend to thin them? Apologising for thus trespassing on your time, and anticipating your kind reply - I am, Madam, gratefully yours, Clara.<sup>86</sup>

The editors suggested that “‘Clara’ should wear kid gloves constantly, so as to improve the colour of her hands, but for the shape of them we fear that is irremediable”. The editors also suggested that other readers might give Clara good advice on both points.<sup>87</sup> This correspondence suggests how eagerly Victorian women cared for their hands. Robert Kemp Philp also pointed out that fine hands should not just be clean, but also be kept in constant motion, ‘which will occasion the blood to circulate freely, and have a wonderful effect’.<sup>88</sup> The ‘motion’ recommended for a woman was to perform needlework or housework, which could enhance her femininity as well as improve the house, though of course too much work could make her hands coarse.

Age and marital status were two significant forms of identity that were expressed through the Victorian dress code. For young unmarried women, nothing looked better than simplicity.<sup>89</sup> As Beeton pointed out, modest dresses could help them to attract a husband suitable for the position of their family.<sup>90</sup> Nancy Armstrong claims that fashionable girls who “‘came out’ into society at around the age of seventeen were modest and biddable and perfectly aware that their first duty was to take themselves off their parents’ hands and marry well”, but warned that they should not attend dinner parties too frequently.<sup>91</sup> For an evening party white muslin or tarlatan was considered to be the most suitable material for young unmarried women, and showy silks, costly cashmere, furs or dazzling ornamentation were considered inappropriate, as they would be judged to indicate ‘an unrestrained love of luxury, and deprive themselves of the pleasure of receiving those ornaments from the hand of the man of their choice’,

<sup>85</sup> Philp, *Every-Day Book*, p. 54; *How to Dress I*, p. 57; *Lady's Manual*, p. 45.

<sup>86</sup> ‘Notes & Queries on Dress - How to Improve the Colour and Shape of the Hands’, *LN*, 15 November 1862, Issue 829, p. 3, GD:DX1900493584. In 1863, *LN* merged with *Queen*.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Philp, *Every-Day Book*, p. 54.

<sup>89</sup> *Hand-Book of Etiquette*, p. 10; *Etiquette for Ladies and Gentlemen*, p. 79; *Good Society*, p. 181. According to census statistics, middle-class women married at about the age of 25, while ‘men were older when they married, sometimes well into their 30s’. Cited in Draznin, *Housewife*, p. 4; Branca, *Sisterhood*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>90</sup> Beeton, *Etiquette*, p. 123.

<sup>91</sup> N. Armstrong, *Victorian Jewelry* (1976), p. 18. On a Victorian debutante, see M. Parsons (ed.), *Every Girl's Duty: The Diary of A Victorian Debutante Alice Catherine Miles, 1850-1926* (1992).

according to *The Ladies' Science of Etiquette*.<sup>92</sup> Hair could be decorated with a small number of flowers, such as rosebuds, which denoted a young girl, roses (bashful modesty), lilies (spotless and immaculate chastity), or violets, signifying the Virgin.<sup>93</sup> Flowers were thought naturally suitable for young unmarried women, whereas for married and older women, flowers could be used as decoration on their dresses or caps, but not worn in the hair.

Young unmarried women, meanwhile, could wear only a little jewellery, and pearls, which were a symbol of purity and humility, were thought to be the most appropriate option for them.<sup>94</sup> In *Female Beauty* (1837), Mrs Walker pointed out that 'your ladies should never wear rings on their fingers, unless they desire to seem older'.<sup>95</sup> In *Victorian Jewellery*, Armstrong also argued that:

if she [a Victorian woman] never got married of course she never got the chance of having anything new belonging to herself. She would almost certainly be lent or given a long, thin gold chain, a small string of pearls, some seed-pearls and a cameo which might be placed upon a velvet ribbon and tied about her throat.<sup>96</sup>

For Victorian women, the most important career was marriage, and a woman's body and clothing were regarded as evidence of her husband's wealth and success. Conversely, unmarried women had to dress simply, because they had no 'career' on which to support their lives. In one of the most famous contemporary novels, *Little Women* (1868), by the American novelist Louisa May Alcott, a young woman named Margaret March led the Moffat girls to dress her up like a 'fine lady', wearing a very low-cut, tight dress, make-up and a set of jewellery including bracelets, necklace, a brooch and earrings. People attending the party commented, though, that 'she's nothing

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<sup>92</sup> 'A Lady', *The Ladies' Science of Etiquette* (Edinburgh, 1851), 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., pp. 44-45. Davidoff and Hall have argued that 'silk, always costly, and once only worn by the aristocracy, became closely associated with feminine gentility, and the silk gown a symbol of affluence but with erotic overtones. Young innocent girls were kept in cottons and muslins, for silks belonged to the mature and sexually experienced'. Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 413.

<sup>93</sup> *Lady's Manual*, p. 45; Beeton, *Etiquette*, p. 177; Philp, *Every-Day Book*, p. 45; *Etiquette for Ladies*, p. 16; *Good Society*, pp. 182-183; B. Seaton, *The Language of Flowers: A History* (1995), pp. 47, 94, 192. Many of John Ruskin's works used flowers to represent a young woman, such as *Sesame and Lilies* (1865) and *Proserpina: Studies of Wayside Flowers While the Air Was Pure among the Alps and in the Scotland and England Which my Father Knew*, Vols. 1-2 (1875-86). In the early and mid-Victorian period, every subject seemed to denote religious beliefs. For the meaning of Victorian flowers, see L. Hooper, *The Ladies' Hand-Book of the Language of Flowers* (1844); Lady M. Callcott, *A Scripture Herbal* (1842); [Anon.], *The Scripture Garden Walk* (1832).

<sup>94</sup> J. Tickell (ed.), *Gentlewomen Aim to Please, edited from Victorian Manuals of Etiquette* (1938), p. 17. A Victorian engagement ring was often made out of simple yellow or rose gold.

<sup>95</sup> *Lady's Manual*, p. 45; M. Flower, *Victorian Jewellery* (1951), with A Chapter on Collecting by D. L. Moore, p. 6.

<sup>96</sup> Armstrong, *Jewellery*, p. 18. Her jewellery was often provided by her mother, grandmother and possibly her aunts, because 'one should never look like a pauper'. *Ibid.*

but a doll', making her feel uncomfortable and ashamed of herself. After that, she never did it again.<sup>97</sup> In the same year, the English journalist Eliza Lynn Linton (1822-98) also argued that a middle-class girl who was enamoured of dressing up, dying her hair, or wearing make-up was considered to be immoral and failing her gender and social position.<sup>98</sup> Nevertheless, as Dinah Maria Mulock Craik (1826-87) mentioned, this did not mean that unmarried women had to grow careless and 'old-fashioned' in their dress: 'What does it signify? - Nobody cares'.<sup>99</sup>

There was a widespread association between youth, purity and the colour white. It was not recommended that little girls should dress in white, because it was thought that they might not be able to keep their dresses clean and white.<sup>100</sup> However, as Anthea Jarvis notes, the dress worn for confirmation and first communion did have to be white, as confirmation was regarded as 'a formal rite of passage from childhood into adult life'.<sup>101</sup> White was the symbol of innocence, purity and goodness, and thus it was also recommended for wedding dresses.<sup>102</sup> In *English Women's Clothing in the Nineteenth Century*, Cunningham referred to a grey wedding dress that was worn by a bride, aged 23, who was considered 'too old to wear white'.<sup>103</sup> For a second marriage, a bride was advised to wear a silver-grey, pearl-white or dove-colour dress, and also to wear a bonnet instead of a virgin veil.<sup>104</sup> Grey was the most appropriate colour for the bride who was also in mourning. On 29 March 1871, on the occasion of her marriage to Mr William Gould at Broadclyst Parish Church, near Exeter, Miss Albina Thomas wore a grey and white check wedding dress decorated with jet buttons and black trimming.<sup>105</sup> White and black could still be used for part of a wedding dress, but an entirely white wedding dress did not show respect for the deceased, while a completely black wedding

<sup>97</sup> L. M. Alcott, *Little Women*, <<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/ALCOTT/ch9.html>> [accessed 15 October 2012] As *Little Women* had proved so successful, the second volume, *Good Wives*, was published in 1869.

<sup>98</sup> E. L. Linton, *The Girl of the Period, and Other Social Essays, Vol. 1* (1883), pp. 1-9. The article was originally published in the *Saturday Review* in 1868. Eliza had married the engraver and radical republican William James Linton (1812-97) in 1858, but separated from him in 1867.

<sup>99</sup> D. M. M. Craik, *A Woman's Thoughts about Women* (1858), p. 325.

<sup>100</sup> Tickell (ed.), *Gentlewomen*, p. 15; Routledge, *Ball-Room Guide*, p. 12.

<sup>101</sup> A. Jarvis, 'The Dress Must Be White, and Perfectly Plain, and Simple: Confirmation and First Communion Dress, 1850-2000', *Costume*, 43(2009), 83-98(p. 84).

<sup>102</sup> W. J. Audsley, *Taste versus Fashionable Colours, A Manual for Ladies, on Colour in Dress* (1863), p. 39.

<sup>103</sup> Cunningham, *English Women's Clothing*, p. 17.

<sup>104</sup> E. Cheadle, *Manners of Modern Society: Being A Book of Etiquette* (1872), 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., p. 82.

<sup>105</sup> The document obtained from the RH. Patricia Jalland argues that 'widows often had a more difficult life than widowers because the consolation of paid employment and remarriage were generally reserved for men'. Widows over thirty years old had far less hope of remarriage than widowers, and after the age of forty their prospects were negligible, according to William Farr's tables of marriage rates for 1851 and 1870-2. Jalland, *Death*, pp. 12, 230, 253.

dress was considered unlucky for marriage.

After her wedding, a woman had to dress according to the social status of her husband. The idealised middle-class wife depended on her husband's economic resources, and she was not allowed to undertake paid work because that would destroy the reputation of the family.<sup>106</sup> That may explain why, according to Beeton, 'many ladies prefer that their dressmaker, silk mercer, shoemaker, and others, should send their bills to their husband'. However, Beeton also suggested that women should have some 'pin money' for themselves to pay bills, to 'avoid a number of disputes, particularly among touchy people'.<sup>107</sup> In 1847, *The Quarterly Review* stated that:

the responsibilities of a wife in this department are very serious. In point of fact she dresses for two... Nature has expressly assigned her as the only safe investment for his vanities; and she who wantonly throws them back from their natural course deserves either to see them break out on his own person, or appear in that of another.<sup>108</sup>

However, no particular dresses were required on the days when a newly-married woman received her friends and relatives. Light silk dresses in summer and dresses of rich silks or velvet in winter were recommended, but it was considered inappropriate to decorate the hair with flowers.<sup>109</sup> According to *How to Dress*, 'the dress of a young matron should be somewhat richer than that of an unmarried girl'.<sup>110</sup> Black velvets, for example, were suggested as suitable for married women for dinner dress, but should 'never be chosen by anyone under twenty-five'.<sup>111</sup> For an evening party, married women could wear silk or satin dresses trimmed with lace, tulle or flowers.<sup>112</sup> The head could be decorated with a few feathers, which was thought unsuitable for a young unmarried woman.<sup>113</sup>

For middle-aged or older women, the cap was employed as an accessory essential for maintaining decency. As regards middle-aged women, *Prime Time: A History of the Middle-Aged in Twentieth Century Britain* (1997) by John Benson points out that the definition of midlife was between 30 and 50 years old, in accordance with

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<sup>106</sup> It is not my intention to argue that middle-class women did not actually work, but to focus on why the dress of married women was considered to represent the wealth of her husband. Margot Finn has argued that a husband had to keep his wife in an appropriate manner: the law of necessities allowed married women to purchase essential items, such as food, clothing, lodgings and medicine, using their husband's credit. M. Finn, 'Women, Consumption and Coverture in England, c. 1760-1860', *The Historical Journal*, 39:3(1996), 703-722(p. 707).

<sup>107</sup> Beeton, *Etiquette*, p. 103.

<sup>108</sup> 'Art of Dress', *The Quarterly Review*, 79(1847), p. 379, cited in Roberts, 'Exquisite Slave', p. 566.

<sup>109</sup> Audsley, *Taste versus Fashionable Colour*, p. 39; *How to Dress I*, p. 53.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> 'On the Unites of Dress and Contrast of Colour', *LT*, 1 April 1861, GD:DX1901524835.

<sup>112</sup> *Good Society*, p. 182.

<sup>113</sup> *Hand-Book of Etiquette*, p. 10; Armstrong, *Jewelry*, p. 18

British census figures in 1851 and 1871.<sup>114</sup> In 1859, Eliza Leslie (1787-1858) claimed that women over 35 were advised to wear a cap, even if their hair showed no signs of middle age: 'A simple cap imparts a grace and softness to a faded face, and renders less conspicuous the inroad of time'.<sup>115</sup> Without covering her hair, a woman was seldom able to maintain her self-respect, nor to win the respect of others. Grey hair gave women a masculine look, and long grey locks and ringlets looked both tasteless and 'ghastly'.<sup>116</sup> It was even worse to wear an auburn wig, since it was necessary to make sure that the false hair was the same shade as the natural hair, and that it was not too thick or too full of curls. A cap was therefore not only important for middle-aged and elderly women, but also for those who had thin or weak hair, given that it was considered immoral for a woman to show off her bare head.<sup>117</sup> A cap, however, should never be in a bright colour. As Leslie mentioned, 'these colours (deep, heavy pinks and blues, and reddish lilacs) vulgarize every thing they are intended to decorate. High-coloured ribbons, flowered or figure, are decidedly vulgar'.<sup>118</sup> Caps could be trimmed with tabs or broad strings to tie under the chin of the wearer, while a short or round-eared cap revealed the cheeks and ears, and also exposed wrinkles on the chin or on the neck.<sup>119</sup>

Although a middle-aged woman had to cease to dress in a youthful manner, this did not mean that she had an excuse for dressing untidily. Craik argued:

neatness invariable; hues carefully harmonised, and as time advances, subsiding into a general unity of tone, softening and darkening in colour, until black, white, and grey alone remain, as the suitable garb for old age: these things are every woman's bounden duty to observe as long as she lives. [...] To 'grow old gracefully', as one, who truly has exemplified her theory, has written and expressed it, is a good and beautiful thing; to grow old worthily, a better.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> J. Benson, *Prime Time: A History of the Middle-Aged in Twentieth Century Britain* (1997), p. 11, cited in K. Heath, *Aging by the Book: The Emergence of Midlife in Victorian Britain* (Albany, NY, 2009), p. 6. For elderly women and widows in Victorian novels, *Ibid.*, esp. chs. 3 & 4, pp. 73-170.

<sup>115</sup> E. Leslie, *Miss Leslie's Behaviour Book: A Guide and Manual for Ladies* (Philadelphia, 1859), p. 121. Eliza was born in Philadelphia, accompanied her parents to England in 1793, and returned to America in 1800.

<sup>116</sup> Victorian women did dye their hair, though an 'artificial' look was considered immoral. This is why prescriptive literature suggested women should instead wear a head covering. Women's periodicals, on the other hand, provided information on how to dye hair properly, and many advertisements for hair colourants claimed that by using the products, women's hair would look natural and healthy. On make-up, see Chapter 3, p. 142.

<sup>117</sup> *Good Society*, p. 175.

<sup>118</sup> Leslie, *Leslie's Behaviour Book*, p. 122.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> Craik, *A Woman's Thoughts*, pp. 326-328.

For a neat and respectable look for an evening party, a middle-aged woman could wear a cap trimmed with flowers to complement her silk or satin dress, with diamonds or gemstones such as amethysts, emeralds, garnets, rubies or topazes.<sup>121</sup> Roxey Ann Caplin (1793-1888) also argued that the midlife period for a woman did not lack its charms, and the freedom and polish of maternity were often more admirable than the evanescent glory of an earlier period.<sup>122</sup> Women at this time of life had to accept the changes in their physical appearance, share their wisdom, and enjoy ‘the comforts of life’.<sup>123</sup> My own impressions of middle-aged women in photographs certainly seem to suggest that this was indeed the prime of their lives, on the basis of their luxurious dresses, vivid way of acting and full frontal gaze.<sup>124</sup>

For Victorian women, one of the most complicated of all etiquette codes was that used for mourning, though it was considered inappropriate for men who had to work. After the death of the Prince Consort Albert in 1861, Queen Victoria decided never to wear bright colours again for the rest of her life, instituting mourning dress etiquette.<sup>125</sup> A mourning dress symbolised the fact that ‘a wife’s identity and sexuality were subsumed in her husband’s and died with him’.<sup>126</sup> A particular colour, material and style of mourning dress also had to be adopted, in accordance with the period of mourning and the relationship between the deceased and the bereaved. The length of mourning for English widows was two years, whilst for their French counterparts it was only one year and six weeks.<sup>127</sup> Black was the symbol of death and sadness.<sup>128</sup> In the deepest period of mourning, the first six months, it was the predominant colour, and

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<sup>121</sup> *Good Society*, p. 178. The fact that etiquette books rarely specified dress for evening parties for elderly women might suggest that older women attended fewer social activities.

<sup>122</sup> R. A. Caplin, *Health and Beauty; or Corset and Clothing Constructed in according with the Physiological Laws of the Human Body* (1864), p. 61. Roxey was a corset-maker and writer, and her husband Jean Francois Isidore Caplin (c. 1790-1872) was a physician. In the words of Kay Heath, “when women near of menopause, which was considered to occur in their mid-forties, they are described with image of lost ‘bloom’, withering, and fading, past their reproductive prime”. The physician Edward John Tilt (1815-93) argued that from 42 to 49 years old, physical strength was ebbing, along with the end of reproductive power in women. The age of 63 was considered to be the grand climacteric of the ancients. Heath, *Aging*, p. 11; E. J. Tilt, *Elements of Health and Principles of Female Hygiene* (1852), pp. 27, 326, 338; Caplin, *Health and Beauty*, p. 80.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>124</sup> On middle-aged women in photographs, see Chapter 3, p. 158.

<sup>125</sup> Queen Victoria was a model of middle-class femininity, which centred on the family, motherhood, and respectability.

<sup>126</sup> Cited in Jalland, *Death*, p. 301; L. Taylor, *Mourning Dress: A Costume and Social History* (1983), p. 49.

<sup>127</sup> Mourning for a parent or children was for twelve months, and it was six months for a sibling or a grandparent, three months for an uncle or aunt, and six weeks for first cousins. About one in five marriages in the 1850s would not have lasted ten years. For the period up to the 1850s there are no official statistics, but in the second half of the century one in twelve women aged between 35 and 44 were widows, as were one in three women aged between 55 and 64. Perkin, *Victorian Women*, p. 132.

<sup>128</sup> Black was used for mourning dresses, which were often also associated with scarlet or violet.

crape, cotton, wool and muslin the favoured materials: satin, velvet or lustrous materials were to be avoided. Shiny fabrics and bright colours were garish and therefore considered disrespectful to the dead. Dresses could be made out of black tulle or crape over black silk, while white tarlatan was only seen as suitable for young women.

In the second mourning period, after six months, black silk, velvet and some jewellery, such as jet, oak and enamel brooches, could be worn, while during the period of half mourning (the second year), white, grey and shades of purple could be employed.<sup>129</sup> Some widows chose to wear full mourning for the rest of their lives, gaining respect and admiration for showing devotion to their dead husbands. Conversely, if a woman wore a colourful dress immediately after mourning, she would be judged to have behaved improperly and could be ostracised by society. Black and dark colours, such as brown and green, were considered to be the most durable and economical colours for dresses.<sup>130</sup> This could be one of the reasons why older women, especially widows who had probably lost their incomes, homes and social status, were always advised to dress in black or dark colours.<sup>131</sup> In *North and South* (1855), Elizabeth Gaskell used a black silk dress to signify Mrs Thornton's age, self-denying widowhood, unbending character, as well as her son's social status.<sup>132</sup>

### **Dress and Season and Occasion**

Aside from a mark of age, class and marital status, this section argues that the dress of a respectable middle-class woman had always to be appropriate to the conditions of the time, season and occasion on which it was to be worn. In the morning, when every good daughter, wife or matron undertook her domestic duties, women had to avoid wearing highly-decorated clothes, accessories or jewellery.<sup>133</sup> A morning dress, a loose robe made out of light, soft, plain washable material, cut to the throat with long sleeves,

<sup>129</sup> 'The Etiquette of Mourning', *Myra's Journal of Dress and Fashion* (1875-1912) (hereafter *Myra's*), 1 February 1875, Issue 1, p. 3, GD:DX1900859373. This periodical had several editions, and cost between 6d. and 2d. Monthly. Its readership was thus a wide one, encompassing both middle and working classes.

<sup>130</sup> 'Sylvia', *How to Dress Well*, p. 115.

<sup>131</sup> Pat Thane argues that 'people who were aged 50 or above in 1851 in the agricultural village of Colyton, Devon' often depended on their children and grandchildren. 'By the time they reached their seventies, almost two-thirds of parents were living with their children, or less frequently, with other relatives'. P. Thane, *Old Age in English History: Past Experiences, Present Issues* (Oxford 2000), pp. 295-296.

<sup>132</sup> Her son John Thornton was the owner of a local mill.

<sup>133</sup> *Good Society*, p. 176; *Etiquette for Ladies and Gentlemen*, p. 80; 'Ἀγωγή', *Hints on Etiquette and the Usages of Society* (1854), p. 59. A wedding ring had to be worn at all times, because it reminded a wife that "she had sworn on holy ground to 'love, honour, and obey' her husband". *Etiquette for Ladies and Gentlemen*, p. 106.

made it possible for a woman to perform her domestic duties easily.<sup>134</sup> However, a morning dress was considered to be a private, informal and unfinished type of dress, and so it should not be worn throughout the day.<sup>135</sup> After breakfast, women were supposed to change their morning dress, as they were supposed to be clad in a suitable dress at any time of the day, in case of unexpected visitors.<sup>136</sup> According to Henry P. Willis, a respectable woman had to change her dress at least three times a day.<sup>137</sup> A woman was not supposed to spend more than ten minutes dressing for an assembly, but she should still appear in a graceful dress.<sup>138</sup> This suggestion seems impractical because it was virtually impossible to change dress in ten minutes, even with a servant's help, but it does imply that a gentlewoman had to learn what kind of colour, material and style of dress would suit her person and the occasion she was about to attend, in order to save time when dressing. A woman was also supposed to finish dressing and to be seated in the drawing room about ten or fifteen minutes before the allotted time, because it was considered impolite to keep her companions waiting.<sup>139</sup>

For evening events, it was thought inappropriate for a woman to wear a full dress for a small dinner or a hotel dinner.<sup>140</sup> On such occasions, coloured velvet and splendid brocades were to be avoided: high dresses of clear muslin or light or transparent materials, or three-quarter dresses, or low dresses covered by lace jackets or capes were considered to be sufficient.<sup>141</sup> Dress worn at a private house needed to be less showy than that worn at a hotel dinner, and a dinner dress was not to be more opulent than one worn at an evening party.<sup>142</sup> *The Habit of Good Society* points out that 'nothing is so vulgar as finery out of place'.<sup>143</sup> It continually argued that:

the [evening] dress should be of a texture that can bear inspection, not flimsy and inexpensive, but good, though not heavy. The same rules may be applied to the ordinary costume in an evening at home, except that the texture may be

<sup>134</sup> *How to Behave I*, p. 34; *Lady's Manual*, p. 46; *Illustrated Manners*, p. 46; 'Taste and Fashion in Feminine Attire', GD:CC1903257011. Women often wore a demi-corset for morning dresses.

<sup>135</sup> 'Popular Etiquette', *The Sheffield & Rotherham Independent* (Sheffield), 24 August 1864, Issue 3,081, p. 4, GD:R3210728509.

<sup>136</sup> *How to Dress I*, p. 46.

<sup>137</sup> Willis, *Etiquette*, p. 44.

<sup>138</sup> *How to Dress I*, p. 45.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48; *Lady's Manual*, p. 47; 'A Lady', *Manual*, p. 11.

<sup>140</sup> *How to Dress I*, p. 47; Leslie, *Miss Leslie's Behaviour Book*, pp. 120, 325; idem, *The Behaviour Book: A Manual for Ladies* (Philadelphia, 1853), p. 120; Beeton, *Etiquette*, p. 59; Tickell (ed.), *Gentlewomen*, p. 15. At the time, there were more large luxury hotels in America than in England, but Beeton also commented that more British women had the opportunity to travel, and that they had to pay attention to their manners when in hotels. Beeton, *Etiquette*, p. 52

<sup>141</sup> Leslie, *The Behaviour Book*, p. 120; Tickell (ed.), *Gentlewomen*, pp. 15, 17.

<sup>142</sup> Leslie, *The Behaviour Book*, p. 120; *How to Dress I*, p. 48; *Good Society*, p. 180.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178.



light.<sup>144</sup>

Etiquette books which focused on dressing for social occasions rarely gave their readers specific details for everyday clothing. Moreover, flowers and jewels were not obligatory accessories in daily life, but they were used to reinforce the social position and marital status of the wearer on social occasions: married or middle-aged women, for example, could wear diamonds, which were considered unsuitable for a young unmarried woman.

To express decorum, women had to dress according to their condition and circumstances, and in this context it is important to examine what was worn for walking, travelling, visiting and balls. Walking was a physical exercise known to improve health and fitness, and as such it was popular among mid-Victorian women.<sup>145</sup> For walking, muslin dresses were more suitable than silk ones because they were not damaged by rainwater. For country walking, dresses were made from solid, strong materials, with a plain bonnet or a little adorned hat, and it was viewed as inappropriate to wear a hat trimmed with long feathers.<sup>146</sup> For walking in the city, dresses had to be 'quiet' in colour and simple, though a 'dowdy' style of dress was to be avoided.<sup>147</sup> However, it was not easy for a woman to follow such dress advice, because it rarely defined what exactly 'quiet' colours were or what constituted a 'dowdy' style. Whether a woman was able to dress properly or elegantly was therefore dependent on her experience and taste.

Moreover, walking dresses were not to be worn with a long train, even if it was in fashion, as it was considered that for walking a long train was likely to become dusty, soiled or muddy.<sup>148</sup> A cartoon from *Punch* in 1863 showed three women walking 'elegantly' in the street, without noticing that their long dresses were stirring up a huge amount of dust, making it difficult for gentlemen to breathe and see (Figure 1-7).<sup>149</sup> The ideal woman was naturally not supposed to create such an unpleasant environment. A bonnet or hat, on the other hand, or an outdoor garment such as a shawl, cloak or mantle, together with a pair of gloves, were seen as essential accessories for a woman to go out.<sup>150</sup> Headwear protected women from the sun and from being glanced at by others, while an outdoor garment protected them from showing their skin and from catching a cold, and, as they helped to maintain a fair complexion; gloves were a mark

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>145</sup> However, Philippe Perrot has argued that '[French] women hardly ever walked. Walking was made perilous by the fullness of their dress, a highly symbolic physical hindrance'. Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie*, p. 95.

<sup>146</sup> *Hand-Book of Etiquette*, p. 8; *Good Society*, p. 176.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*; *Etiquette for Ladies and Gentlemen*, p. 79.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>149</sup> *Punch*, 6 June 1863, p. 229, GD:DX1901577278.

<sup>150</sup> *How to Behave I*, p. 98.

of gentility.<sup>151</sup> A suntan, in contrast, was seen as unladylike.

Permission to use this image not granted.

Fig. 1-7 'Dust Ho! the Long Dress Nuisance', *Punch*, 6 June 1863, p. 229, GD:DX1901577278.

Travelling was an indicator of a woman's social class, but Eliza Leslie, in *Miss Leslie's Behaviour Book* (1859), warned her readers that a travelling dress should not be made from showy silks, nor be accompanied by decorated bonnets, white kid gloves, or jewels: silk and leather was easily damaged by dust and rain, and costly ornamentation brought with it a high risk of loss or theft.<sup>152</sup> Compared with walking dresses, travelling dresses were more substantial and practical, and they could be made out of merino, alpaca, plain cloth, strong India silk or grey or brown linen.<sup>153</sup> A travelling dress was also supposed to include a large cape or pelerine, and a voluminous shawl was necessary for chilly mornings and evenings, but it should be trimmed with wide sleeves, as these were less likely to become stained from perspiration. Again, though, such suggestions seemed inadequate for a woman to prepare her travelling outfits. Based on to the number of enquiries made in women's magazines, it appears that by the 1870s more middle-class women were able to travel abroad, not only to Continental Europe (France, Germany, Italy and Switzerland), but also further afield, to America, Egypt,

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<sup>151</sup> According to the Bible, the use of head coverings was a sign of submission to God. 'The head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. [...] Every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head. [...] That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head because of the angels' (Corinthians 11:3-11).

<sup>152</sup> Leslie, *Leslie's Behaviour Book*, p. 94.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

India, Burma and Australia.<sup>154</sup> They often asked whether there were any specific customs or types of dress they should avoid, proving that dress was both a form of self-representation and a mode of salutation addressed to others.<sup>155</sup>

Similarly, visiting dress had to reflect the social status of the visitor, and to suit the host and occasion. It was often 'exceedingly handsome; gayer in colour and richer in texture', made out of delicate muslins, light silks or grenadines to mark the occasion as a happy one.<sup>156</sup> Women did not need to take off their bonnet and shawl when paying visits, which often took between ten and twenty minutes.<sup>157</sup> If a friend or relative was accompanying a woman, too, her dress should match that of her companion.<sup>158</sup> For condolences, on the other hand, women had to wear a sombre style of dress, to express sadness and respect towards the dead and bereavement.<sup>159</sup> To show respect and hospitality, a woman 'entertaining guests at home' had to avoid wearing showy or rich dresses.<sup>160</sup> As *A Manual of Etiquette* by 'A Lady' stated:

the hostess should be dressed with scrupulous care. Not in all the magnificence of a stage-queen, not bedizened and bejewelled as if you meant to outvie all your guests; not carelessly, negligently, for that would be cast a slight upon the company, but with the utmost attention to propriety.<sup>161</sup>

In other words, a thoughtful hostess would balance her own and her guests' social status to avoid embarrassing her guests, and to show her kindness.

In a ballroom, an important social occasion for introducing young unmarried women to men of high rank, a woman's dress had to be made out of light materials such as tulle, gauze, crepe or netting over coloured silk slips, to help her to dance gracefully.<sup>162</sup> In contrast, heavy richly-trimmed silks, which added weight to a woman's movement, only suited those who did not dance, and strong, bright colours also tired or dazzled other's eyes.<sup>163</sup> In order for a woman to enjoy her dancing, a ball dress should be shorter in length and more close-fitting than a dinner or evening party

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<sup>154</sup> On Thomas Cook (1808-92), who was one of the most successful Victorian tour organisers, see P. Brendon, *Thomas Cook: 150 Years of Popular Tourism* (1991).

<sup>155</sup> *Illustrated Manners*, p. 31.

<sup>156</sup> *Good Society*, pp. 177, 178.

<sup>157</sup> Willis, *Etiquette*, p. 12; 'A Lady', *Manual*, p. 19.

<sup>158</sup> *Lady's Manual*, p. 47.

<sup>159</sup> *Hand-Book of Etiquette*, p. 7.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>161</sup> 'A Lady', *Manual*, p. 41. The reputation of a hostess was often judged by the conduct of her servants, and so she had to treat them with kindness, make sure they were civil and polite, and teach them to assist the visitors in taking off and putting on their cloaks or capes. Craik, *A Woman's Thoughts*, p. 140.

<sup>162</sup> *Good Society*, p. 182; *Hand-Book of Etiquette*, p. 57.

<sup>163</sup> *Good Society*, p. 181; *Lady's Manual*, p. 44; 'A Lady', *Manual*, pp. 36, 44.

dress, the hair should be fastened securely, and little jewellery should be worn.<sup>164</sup> Every woman was supposed to know how to dance. Otherwise, she was considered to be hardly fit for polite society, although it is true that dancing was frowned upon by some highly religious groups, such as Evangelicals, Methodists and Quakers.<sup>165</sup> Furthermore, because of light ball dresses, an elegant woman would bring a warm cloak with her, to avoid becoming cold on a chilly evening.<sup>166</sup> It was of course necessary that dress, as well as showing the wearer's modesty, should also keep her warm.

In addition, dress had to be in harmony with the seasons of the year. It was seen as inappropriate to wear summer materials in winter and winter materials in summer.<sup>167</sup> For walking dress, a cloak made of a light material in the summer and a stout one in the winter was considered to be a good accessory.<sup>168</sup> For carriage or visiting dress, on the other hand, a light scarf made of muslin, silk or grenadine was suitable for summer, while a shawl or mantle made of cashmere or velvet was deemed appropriate for winter.<sup>169</sup> For travelling dress in winter, gingham was warmer and more durable than printed lawn, and it was considered that women should not travel without a warm cloak, mantilla or pelisse, and a pair of travelling boots, which had to be waterproof outside and lined with warm fur or wool inside, because thin shoes and light boots brought on 'colds and coffins'.<sup>170</sup>

The above-mentioned dress etiquette did not apply to working-class or poor women because they did not have enough money or time to dress up, though they did often try hard to keep a 'best' dress for attending special events or going to church. There was also a distinction between the dress etiquette of middle-class women and that of the upper class. An upper-class lady attended more social events, and was expected not to wear the same dresses repeatedly, while some middle-class women might have been unable to take part in an event due to a lack of the appropriate dress. On 21 January 1854, George Eliot replied as follows to the English feminist Bessie Rayner Parkes Belloc (1829-1925):

as I seldom do anything en règle perhaps it will seem only consistent in me if I ask permission to answer Mrs Parkes's invitation through you. I want you to make her understand, as gracefully as you can, that I am really obliged and

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<sup>164</sup> G. Routledge, *Routledge's Ball-Room Guide* (1864), p. 13; Beeton, *Etiquette*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>165</sup> 'A Lady', *Manual*, p. 230. Dancing could also form and strengthen the figure of a woman as well as entertain her mind. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>166</sup> *Good Society*, p. 180.

<sup>167</sup> *How to Behave I*, p. 34.

<sup>168</sup> *Good Society*, p. 177.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> Leslie, *Leslie's Behaviour Book*, pp. 94-95; *Etiquette for Ladies*, p. 17.

pleased by her kind attention in inviting me and that under other circumstances I should have liked immensely to be of the party on Tuesday. But the fact is, I have no ball-dress, nor anything that would pass muster as one, and I can't afford just now to buy one. It would be a crucifixion of my own taste as well as other people's to appear like a withered cabbage in a flower garden. At a dinner-party, when people think only of conversation, one doesn't mind being a dowdy, but it is the essence of a dance that every one should look fresh and elegant - at least as to their garments.<sup>171</sup>

The letter implies that Eliot would wear something slightly worse, and different from what was required if she were to go to the party. This seems to suggest that not every middle-class woman had the opportunity to go to a ball or indeed the finances to buy a ball dress. However, Eliot was practically excluded from polite society because she was cohabiting with a married man George Lewes (1817-78), and so she may not have been invited to many balls. She was, however, perfectly aware that when a woman did not dress in accordance with etiquette, her taste and even her personality would be judged by others, and perhaps condemned. In a ballroom a woman was expected to dance, and her ball dress was required to make her 'look fresh and elegant', and the passage indicates how an unsuitable dress could affect a person's reputation. In short, the fear of vulgarity was the salient feature of mid-Victorian dress etiquette, and thus when they did not have the appropriate dress, many women, like Eliot, preferred not to go to a party in order to avoid being judged. A woman who wished to earn the approval of others therefore had to dress in accordance with her decency, age, social and marital status, as well as the occasion, time and season.

## Conclusion

By studying mid-Victorian prescriptive literature, we understand better not only that the influence of Christianity had created the idealised image of the middle-class woman as the 'Angel in the House', but also that this ideal dictated the primary moral values that were attached to women's clothing. Simplicity was an indicator of a woman's modesty in that it showed that she paid attention to domestic work rather than to herself. The neat, prim grey dresses of the Quakers symbolised their religious sincerity, and in general

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<sup>171</sup> G. S. Haight (ed.), *The George Eliot Letters, Vol. 2: 1852-1858* (New Haven, 1954), p. 138, B&I:S7133-D161. Through her self-portraits, it can be surmised that Eliot often wore simple clothes, but did not dress up like her ideal heroine Dorothea. Compared with her contemporaries like Geraldine Jewsbury and Mrs Jane Carlyle, Eliot rarely mentioned her items of clothing in her letters and diaries. On paintings of George Eliot, see P. Goldman, 'A New Portrait of George Eliot?' *Electronic British Library Journal*, pp. 174-181, <[www.bl.uk/ebj/1982articles/pdf/article11.pdf](http://www.bl.uk/ebj/1982articles/pdf/article11.pdf)>[accessed 30 November 2012]; *National Portrait Gallery*, <[www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp01124/george-eliot-mary-ann-cross-nee-evans](http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp01124/george-eliot-mary-ann-cross-nee-evans)>[accessed 2 December 2012]

cleanliness denoted personal hygiene, moral qualities and self-respect, as well as being a signifier of social class.

Furthermore, Christian beliefs informed a strict gender identity, and so middle-class women's dresses had to be ultra-feminine. A respectable woman had to wear constricting undergarments of a 'proper' size, as the use of these was considered to show moral restraint, as well as ensuring that she had a good figure and elegant posture. In contrast, wearing too tight a corset or too large a crinoline would harm a woman's health and impair their own and others' movement. The masculine Bloomer dress, which was regarded as being part of a female social movement and as destructive of femininity, was never widely accepted by middle-class women.

The dress of a respectable middle-class woman had to express her age, marital and social status, as well as her decorum. At an evening party, for example, a married woman, who had to represent her husband's social status, could wear a silk, satin or velvet dress, and rich jewellery, while an unmarried woman was to wear a white muslin or tarlatan dress, and her hair could be decorated with flowers. A cap was an essential accessory for a middle-aged and elderly woman, in order to present a decent image and to hide grey hair. A dignified English widow had to wear mourning dress to mourn her dead husband for at least two years, and, a middle-class woman who did not follow the principles of etiquette was considered to be a fallen woman who, if we are to believe the novels of the time, would be excluded from civilised society.

To conform to the idealised image of the middle-class woman, it was necessary to dress according to the conditions of the time of day, the season of the year, and the specific occasion in question. In the morning, a good woman would wear a simple dress to perform her domestic duties, while an outdoor garment, headwear and gloves were considered to be essential accessories for going out. Walking dresses had to be made out of solid, strong materials, while visiting dresses were to be brighter in colour and made of more delicate materials. A woman's dress also had to match that of her companions, and that of a hostess to suit that of her guests. In the ballroom, a woman should wear a dress made of light material, which would be cut shorter in length to help her dance gracefully. A thoughtful woman, nevertheless, would bring a cloak in cold weather to avoid catching a cold, because clothes also had to serve as protection from the elements. Prescriptive literature provides important insights into Victorians' dress codes such as these, but it cannot be regarded as evidence of existing attitudes or women's lived experiences. Other forms of cultural representation, too, tell different stories about the meanings of clothes. The next chapter will look at how mid-Victorian

women's magazines propagated fashion and how the clothes of respectable middle-class women presented in these sources balanced the morality and etiquette we have seen in this chapter, with the need to follow fashion.

## Chapter 2

### ‘Simple yet Elegant’:<sup>1</sup> Texts, Images and Surviving Objects

In 1851, a letter from the Scottish novelist Susan Edmonstone Ferrier (1782-1854) to her relative Helen Tennent (fl. 1833) described an event:

the box has arrived and the cloak is perfect! It is really everything that a cloak should, would, and could be, and all that I could have desired had I had the ordering, not the paying, of it. I wish you had been present at the unfolding of it. Mowbray was in hysterics of delight, and could only utter broken exclamations of rapture, ‘What a cloak! splendid, handsome, judicious, comfortable, elegant, richest of silks, beautifully made, so light, so warm, so ladylike, &c., &c.’ [...] My only fault to it, is that it is too good, and that I shall find it difficult to support the dignity of such a cloak, so much will be expected of it!<sup>2</sup>

This letter shows how much one particular woman valued her new cloak: she draws attention not only to its appearance, its ‘splendid’, ‘handsome’, ‘richest’, ‘beautiful’ and ‘ladylike’ qualities, but also to its practical value, ‘comfortable’ and ‘warm’, and to her taste, ‘perfect’, ‘judicious’, ‘elegant’ and ‘good’. The value a dress held for one individual woman cannot, of course, represent the fashion culture of mid-Victorian women in general, and to gain a broader picture of this we need to look further afield. This chapter, therefore, uses women’s magazines, which were widely read by middle-class women at the time, to analyse how fashion was propagated. Importantly, though, the chapter will compare published textual and visual records of fashion with surviving dresses. This will enable an analysis of the extent the clothes actually worn by middle-class women reflected the fashion described and portrayed in this medium, and how such women negotiated morality, dress etiquette and fashion.

Historians have studied women’s magazines in general terms, but have rarely looked at the fashionable clothes described in the medium. In earlier studies of women’s magazines, Cynthia White considered how the construction, character and scope of women’s magazines between 1800 and 1968 were affected by social, economic and technological change, while Alison Adburgham argued that as well as male publishers, many pre-Victorian women, such as Aphra Behn (1640-89), Eliza Haywood (1693-1756), Marguerite Gardiner (1789-1849) and Caroline Norton (1808-77), earned money to support themselves or their families through writing, editing or publishing

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<sup>1</sup> ‘*La Mode*’, *LF*, 1 March 1855, GD:DX1901618708.

<sup>2</sup> J. A. Doyle (ed.), *Memoir and Correspondence of Susan Ferrier 1782-1854* (1898), p. 318, B&I:S4646-D226. Susan was the daughter of James Ferrier (1744-1829), one of Principal Clerks of the Court Session, and brought up in the Presbyterian Church.



articles in periodicals.<sup>3</sup> These studies have, however, neglected to study how women readers were affected by these periodicals. The collection of essays *Women's Worlds: Ideology, Femininity and the Woman's Magazine* provides a critique of women's magazines from the eighteenth century to the 1980s, arguing that such magazines are 'a modern discourse of womanhood and/or femininity'.<sup>4</sup> By analysing in detail the readership of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century women's magazines in Britain, Margaret Beetham declares that the domestic women's magazine offered 'an illusion of security to women readers caught up in this conflict – first, by asserting the connection between domestic and feminine virtue'.<sup>5</sup> Kay Boardman argues, meanwhile, that women's magazines presented an ideology of domesticity, but neither author is much concerned with the social history of dress.<sup>6</sup> Christopher Breward, on the other hand, notes that 1870s and 1880s periodicals emphasised a 'luxurious fantasy' which limited itself to responding to readers' demands without providing didactic advice or paying attention to 'the complicated and morally problematized lives' of the readers, encouraging the readers simply to consume fashion.<sup>7</sup> There is, however, a small existing literature on fashion writings in nineteenth-century women's magazines which can help us to understand the values mid-Victorians attached to their clothes.

As regards images of clothing, hand-coloured fashion plates reached their apogée in the third quarter of the century. Vyvyan Holland argued that, without fashion plates, 'it would be almost impossible to study the evolution of costume at all', but ignored the fact that fashion plates, as with other historical sources, have their own problems.<sup>8</sup> Doris Langley More and Anne Buck commented that fashion plates served as a kind of advertising to encourage women to purchase, but it seems that few of the fashions depicted were actually worn by Englishwomen.<sup>9</sup> In the opinion of Lou Taylor, fashion plates could only be 'idealised images of a seasonal rather than any kind of

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<sup>3</sup> C. White, *Women's Magazines, 1693-1968* (1970), p. 18; A. Adburgham, *Women in Print: Writing Women and Women's Magazines from the Restoration to the Accession of Victoria* (1972), p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Cited in R. Ballaster, M. Beetham, E. Frazer, and S. Hebron, *Women's Worlds: Ideology, Femininity and the Woman's Magazine* (1991), p. 4; M. Beetham, *A Magazine of her Own?: Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine, 1800-1914* (1996), pp. 1-2.

<sup>5</sup> K. Boardman, 'A Material Girl in A Material World: the Fashionable Female Body in Victorian Women's Magazines', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 3:1(2010), 93-110; idem, 'The Ideology of Domesticity: the Regulation of the Household Economy in Victorian Women's Magazines', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 33:2(2000), 150-164; Beetham, *Magazine*; M. Beetham and K. Boardman (eds.), *Victorian Women's Magazines: An Anthology* (Manchester, 1991); Ballaster et al., *Worlds*, p. 107.

<sup>6</sup> Boardman, 'Domesticity', p. 162.

<sup>7</sup> C. Breward, 'Femininity and Consumption: The Problem of the Late Nineteenth-Century Fashion Journal', *Journal of Design History*, 7:2(1994), 71-89(pp. 71, 77, 89).

<sup>8</sup> Holland, *Plates*, p. 21.

<sup>9</sup> Moore, *Plates*, p. 151; Buck, *Victorian Costume*, p. 8.

stylistic reality'.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, few commentators have worked on interpreting the social and cultural meanings of fashion plates. Recently, Sharon Marcus has argued that, fashionable dress apart, women in Victorian fashion plates reveal a certain degree of lesbianism and homoeroticism, because they were often depicted staring at each other's bodies, or touching their hands, arms or shoulders, though she disregards the less popular male fashion plates of the same period (Figure 2-1).<sup>11</sup> Women's magazines targeted women readers, so their fashion plates were logically based on female figures, and neither did men's fashion plates often show a female figure.<sup>12</sup> Victorian fashion plates certainly concentrated on single-gender relationships, despite the fact that it had not been unusual for a couple to appear in fashion plates of the Regency period.



Fig. 2-1 The Men's Fashion Plate, *Gazette of Fashion* (1846-88), September 1856, FM.

With regard to earlier studies of dresses, the works of Cecil W. Cunnington and Anne Buck focus on the evolution of Victorian dress styles rather than the social, cultural and economical context, and the actual interaction between middle-class women and their clothes, and fashion in print, has remained largely unstudied.<sup>13</sup> *The*

<sup>10</sup> Taylor, *Study of Dress*, p. 136.

<sup>11</sup> S. Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Oxford, 2007), ch. 3, pp. 111-166; idem, 'Reflections on Victorian Fashion Plates', *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 14:3(2003), 4-33.

<sup>12</sup> Women's fashion plates sometimes portrayed little boys, perhaps because taking care of children was considered to be women's prime responsibility.

<sup>13</sup> Cunnington, *English Women's Clothing*; idem, *Handbook of English Costume*; Buck, *Victorian Costume*.

*Fashion System* (1967), by the French semiotician Roland Barthes, argues that fashion is a system which embraces the verbal structure of the written clothing, the iconic structure of the image-clothing, and the technological structure of the real clothing.<sup>14</sup> However, the latter two were rarely discussed, because Barthes was only interested in the written text described in late 1950s French fashion magazines. He argued that image-clothing ‘may well be warm, strange, attractive, modest, protective, etc., before being fashionable; on the contrary, this same dress, described, can only be Fashion itself’.<sup>15</sup> His analysis deals with three ‘shifters’: *vestimentary* code (the code of what is fashionable), the rhetorical system, including the appropriateness of the dress in a certain social milieu, and ‘the image of the world and of fashion that the journal has or wants to convey’.<sup>16</sup> This chapter is divided into three sections, and applies Barthes’s three categories of written clothing, image clothing and real clothing to examine how women’s magazines used language to build up a textual construction of the fashion world, how fashion plates portrayed feminine beauty, how women readers reacted to such portrayals in their real clothing, and what surviving dresses reveal about Victorian women’s dress culture.

The sources for the following analysis are the three sets of women’s monthly magazines: *NMBA*, *LF* and *EDM*, each of which targeted slightly different groups of middle-class women readers, but all of which were extensively circulated at the time. It might, therefore, be expected that they should provide us with a clear view of the value attached to their fashionable clothes by middle-class women between 1851 and 1875. The fashion plates used in this chapter are limited to *NMBA*, *LF* and *EDM*, but fashion-plate scrapbooks from CM, FM, ML, RH, and WM are also covered. Most importantly, this chapter includes 270 surviving dresses from ten institutions: BCM (29), BM (20), CM (9), FM (15), MCG (71), ML (24), RH (43), V&A (25), WA (1) and WM (17).

### **Fashion in Words**

The first periodical for women was *The Ladies’ Mercury*, published by the London bookseller John Dunton in 1693.<sup>17</sup> From the eighteenth century onwards, however, the government had imposed a succession of Stamp Acts and heavy taxes on paper and

<sup>14</sup> R. Barthes, *The Fashion System* (1985), trans. by M. Ward and R. Howard, p. 3. It was originally published in French as *Système de la Mode*, in 1967.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>16</sup> Cited in J. D. Culler, *Barthes: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2002), p. 61.

<sup>17</sup> White, *Magazines*, p. 17; Ballaster et al., *Women’s Worlds*, p. 47.

advertising in order to control access to ‘news’, making the cost of periodicals prohibitive. Following the abolition of paper and advertising taxes in 1862, periodicals of all price ranges underwent a boom.<sup>18</sup> Because of economic growth, too, the readership for such publications gradually began to include both middle and working classes. According to the census, between 1850 and 1860 the population of the middle class increased from 357,000 to 482,000.<sup>19</sup> Although mid-Victorian women’s magazines provided well-developed fashion plates, most information was still relayed through words, making language a crucial element in the provision of instruction regarding Victorian fashion. This section first dissects the target and implied readers of three sets of sources: *NMBA*, *LF* and *EDM*, and then goes on to analyse the fashion discourse of monthly fashion columns and the descriptions of fashion plates between 1851 and 1875.<sup>20</sup>

*NMBA* started life as a penny weekly periodical, *The Maids, Wives, and Widows’ Penny Magazine and Gazette of Fashion* (1832-33). In July 1833, it became *Weekly Belle Assemblée* (1833-34), which cost 3d. and was edited by the poet and novelist Mrs (Margaret Harries) Cornwell-Baron Wilson (1797-1846). In 1834, it was revamped as a one-shilling monthly periodical entitled *The New Monthly Belle Assemblée* (1834-70).<sup>21</sup> Its title used French words to emphasise its cachet, and its cover proudly proclaimed that it enjoyed the immediate patronage of Her Royal Highness, the Duchess of Kent and the mother of Queen Victoria, indicating how fashionable the magazine was among its royal and courtly readers.<sup>22</sup> *NMBA*, on the other hand, was the first lady’s journal to create a space for the housewife, also providing articles on morality.<sup>23</sup> In 1852, the contents of *NMBA* were identical, the titles apart, to those of *The Ladies’ Cabinet of Fashion, Music, and Romance* (1832-70) (hereafter *LCF*) and *The Ladies’ Companion and Monthly Magazine* (1849-70) (hereafter *LC*).<sup>24</sup> At this time, it regularly published practical tips on household

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>19</sup> R. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public 1800-1900* (Chicago, 1957), p. 83.

<sup>20</sup> The format and readership of each magazine was apt to change during different editorships and periods, particularly in the case of the long-running periodicals. This discussion is therefore based on the years to which my research is limited.

<sup>21</sup> Between 1836 and 1846, its competitor *The Court Magazine and Monthly Critic and Lady’s Magazine* cost 2s.6d. Beetham, *Magazine*, pp. 27, 40.

<sup>22</sup> Its title was perhaps copied from a dominant Regency periodical *La Belle Assemblée* (1806-37), published by the English publisher John Bell (1745-1831).

<sup>23</sup> H. Hyde, *Mr and Mrs Beeton* (1951), p. 69; White, *Magazines*, p. 43.

<sup>24</sup> *LCF* and *LC* were also priced at 1s. The titles of *LCF* and *LC* clearly revealed that their target readers were wealthy ‘ladies’. Vyvyan Holland argued that, though *LC* did copy French plates, they were poorly drawn and coloured. Holland, *Plates*, p. 69.

management and domestic issues, with a view to attracting middle-class women.

Nevertheless, *NMBA* was hardly regarded as a fashion journal. Before it was incorporated with *LCF* and *LC*, *NMBA* devoted two pages to colour plates containing around six figures, two and a half pages to a monthly fashion report, and another one and a half pages to descriptions of fashion plates. After the incorporation, it included a colour plate consisting of up to three figures and half a page for a description of the plate, 'The Toilet', though the quality and the size of the figures were greatly improved.<sup>25</sup> In its column 'Answers to Correspondents', it rarely replied to questions about fashion. By examining other articles in the magazine, though, which included such material as 'Royal Academic Schools for Ladies', 'Relation of Air, Water, and Light to Animal and Vegetable Life' and 'Methods of Studying in Natural History', it may be seen that its readers must have been well educated.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, *NMBA* usually contained some French, German or Latin words and phrases in its articles, and sometimes a whole article might be printed in French, making the high level of reading ability among its readers quite clear.<sup>27</sup> In April 1869, *NMBA* even announced that the purpose of its publication was to enhance women's education.<sup>28</sup>

The leading Parisian fashion journal, *Le Follet Courrier des Salons, Journal des Modes* (1829-92), started to publish an English edition in 1846, which was known as *Le Follet* (1846-1900). Its cover was published under the patronage of the Queen, and from May 1863, Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales was added. During the period between 1851 and 1875, it cost 1s.6d., and provided an average of three hand-coloured fashion plates with a multi-page fashion report, entitled 'La Mode Translated from the French', as well as descriptions of fashion plates. Its readers concentrated on upper and upper middle-class women who were interested in fashion. Kay Boardman points out that *LF* is considered to be one of the "prototypes for the modern 'glossy' magazines".<sup>29</sup> Contemporary periodicals, such as the *Brighton Gazette* (1825-1980), the *Morning Advertiser* (1794-), the *Telegraph* (1855-) and the *Wiltshire Independent*, all admired its 'excellent', 'exquisite', 'handsome' and 'splendid' hand-coloured fashion plates, 'attractive description' and 'the perfection of correct

<sup>25</sup> Sometimes either the plate or the description was missing, at times left out in the original design and on other occasions removed from the binding. The 1860 volume, for example, announced that the recent gales in the Channel had prevented parcels from Paris from arriving before the publication date, explaining the absence of colour fashion plates (p. 224).

<sup>26</sup> *NMBA*, April 1859, p. 223; *Ibid.*, July 1859, p. 50; *Ibid.*, May 1862, p. 280.

<sup>27</sup> J. A. Auerbach, 'What They Read: Mid-Nineteenth Century English Women's Magazines and the Emergence of A Consumer Culture', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 30:2(1997), 121-140(p. 123).

<sup>28</sup> *NMBA*, April 1869, p. 221.

<sup>29</sup> Boardman, 'Material Girl', p. 96.

taste'.<sup>30</sup> Obviously, fashion was the most important feature of *LF*, though it also provided other articles of a domestic nature. Vyvyan Holland even commented that 'no collection of fashion plates can be representative without it [*LF*]'.<sup>31</sup>

The first successful middle-class women's magazine, *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* (1852-79), was launched in May 1852 by Samuel Beeton. Its title indicated its readership and contents, which aimed to be relevant to the domestic work of an ideal Englishwoman. Its content often included practical needlework and other knowledge for the home, such as childcare, how to treat illness, cooking recipes, and advice on household budgets, as well as articles on subjects like music, literature and history. The flower mastheads of its new edition (from May 1860) expressed the natural femininity of women.<sup>32</sup> *EDM* targeted middle-class women, but its readership also extended to some working-class women. The reason for this was that *EDM* used simple language and included practical tips for needlework, making it attractive to the working classes.<sup>33</sup> Some of its articles, too, dealt with aspects of working-class life.

The fashion column of *EDM* was divided into three noticeable periods. The first period, from 1852 to 1860, included 'Our Practical Dress Instructor', with black and white engravings and crudely-drawn diagrams. From 1860 to 1864, this column was called 'the Fashions', and it contained a monthly fashion report collected from its own Paris correspondents and from Mrs Isabella Beeton, who travelled to Paris twice a year, as well as a colourful exclusive fashion plate with detailed description, and plenty of practical needlework. This development led to the price of *EDM* being increased from 2d. for an octavo copy between 1852 and 1860, to 6d. for a folio new edition for the later years. There was also a regular one-shilling edition with a set of special supplements. In the final period, from 1865 to 1879, the fashion content consisted of a large number of well-produced fashion plates and engravings as well as needlework tips, making up nearly 25 pages. The increase in texts on fashion reflected the fact that its readers were eager not only for visual pleasure from fashion plates, but were also

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<sup>30</sup> "'Le Follet' Opinions of the Press", *LF*, 1 December 1854, Issue 99, p. 96, GD:DX1901622065; "'Le Follet' Extracts from Reviews of the August", *Ibid.*, 1 September 1856, Issue 120, p. 72, GD:DX1901619173; "'Le Follet' during the Siege of Paris", *Ibid.*, 1 January 1871, Issue 292, p. 8, GD:DX1901608429; "Reviews of November Number of 'Le Follet'", *Ibid.*, 1 December 1873, Issue 327, GD:DX1901614569.

<sup>31</sup> Holland, *Plates*, p. 65.

<sup>32</sup> P. Anderson, *The Printed Image and the Transformation of Popular Culture 1790-1860* (Oxford, 1991), p. 150.

<sup>33</sup> In 1841, in England and Wales, the male and female adult literacy rates were 67.3% and 51.1%, and these had risen to 80.6% and 73.2% in 1871. 'But the *quality* of their literacy remained low'. T. W. Heyck, *The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England* (New York, 1982), pp. 25, 199. Literacy rates were often taken from the evidence of marriage registers, in which married couples were able to sign their names, but the ability to sign clearly did not in itself imply good reading skills.

keen to find out more about fashion. The written word could transmit additional information that was not shown in the plates: the description could, for example, indicate the function of the dress shown in the plate, clarify the colour of the dress, particularly in the case of black-and-white engravings, or specify trimmings which were invisible or obscured.

The language used in magazines was a power device which not only encouraged women readers to engage with fashion practice, but also revealed much about mid-Victorian values as regards fashionable clothing. The monthly fashion reports in *LF* and *EDM* often made use of evaluative terms like ‘handsome’, ‘charming’, ‘pretty’, ‘beautiful’, ‘delicate’, ‘elaborate’, ‘stylish’, ‘lovely’, ‘gorgeous’ and ‘dressy’ to heighten the positive impression of clothing, and to give readers the idea that by wearing such a dress, their physical beauty would be enriched. As it was assumed that Victorian women’s dresses represented femininity, women’s magazines did not have to make their feminine traits explicit. They would, however, comment on dress which had a masculine appearance, or that was adorned with military trimmings. From 1873 onwards, *EDM* stated that ‘the masculine-looking jacket with a number of pockets, revers, and buttons’ had been widely adopted.<sup>34</sup> Jackets made with a lot of pockets reveal that women’s dresses in the mid-Victorian period were becoming more functional, with women often tying pockets underneath skirts. However, mid-Victorian women’s dress was by no means completely masculine, as its primary purpose remained to enrich femininity.

The words ‘novelty’, ‘new’, ‘vogue’, ‘fashionable’ and ‘seasonal’ provoked women’s desire for up-to-date designs, and allowed them to distance themselves from the ‘ordinary’. In other words, following fashion also provided women with a modern identity. The use at the same time of other expressions like ‘old-fashioned’ or ‘out of fashion’ warned readers against becoming obsolete or wearing the wrong dress for the season. This mirrors the fashionableness and morality of the wearer, and seasonality, too, was another essential element in fashion writing. A respectable Victorian woman had to dress according to the seasons, and this proves that Victorian women’s magazines promoted not just ‘fashion’, but also ‘appropriateness’. ‘Comfort’ was a

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<sup>34</sup> Cited in ‘The Fashions’, *EDM*, 1 September 1873, Issue 105, p. 136, GD:DX1901421044; *Ibid.*, 1 October 1873, Issue 106, p. 192, GD:DX1901421072; *Ibid.*, 1 December 1874, Issue 120, p. 306, GD:DX1901422982.

considerable factor in winter, and ‘freshness’ in summer.<sup>35</sup> The fact that it was warm did not necessarily mean that a dress was ‘cumbersome’ or immobile, but it did have to be ‘comfortable’, ‘elegant’ and ‘convenient’, and any outer garments had to be ‘easily put on’.<sup>36</sup> The word ‘comfortable’ was also used in reference to walking and travelling dresses, as well as to footwear.<sup>37</sup> A cloak, for instance, had to be ‘comfortable on a rainy day, or to wrap oneself up from the sharp breeze in an open carriage’, while a travelling dress needed to be ‘comfortable, and proof to rain and dust’.<sup>38</sup> This evidence indicates that fashionable women also paid attention to the usefulness of clothes, including qualities such as warmth, softness and waterproofness, as well as taking pleasure in dressing, and that they enjoyed some degree of psychological and physical freedom to undertake outdoor activities. A dress also, of course, had to look ‘fresh’, ‘cool’ and ‘light’ in the morning, in summer, on the beach, or for a picnic or country excursion, and the value and effectiveness of a dress were dependent on the circumstances in which it was worn.<sup>39</sup>

Mid-Victorian fashionable dress was of course indivisible from questions of taste, and adjectives such as ‘elegant’, ‘graceful’ and ‘tasteful’ were employed consistently in fashion texts of the period. *LF* asserted that ‘good taste is law in the fashionable world’, and *EDM* commented that ‘if elegant attire is a necessity of polite life, a certain degree of taste and attention are requisite for all’.<sup>40</sup> But what was meant by ‘good taste’ at the time?<sup>41</sup> *LF* claimed that its column ‘is always guided by good taste, chooses ornaments the least complicated, and most easily discerned by a casual

<sup>35</sup> ‘*La Mode*’, *LF*, 1 April 1854, Issue 91, GD:DX1901621865; *Ibid.*, 1 June 1857, Issue 129, GD:DX1901619365; *Ibid.*, 1 February 1874, Issue 329, GD:DX1901614593; ‘The Fashions’, *EDM*, 1 December 1862, Issue 32, p. 92, GD:DX1901422761.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 October 1862, Issue 30, p. 284, GD:DX1901422726; *Ibid.*, 1 December 1862, GD:DX1901422761.

<sup>37</sup> ‘*La Mode*’, *LF*, 1 December 1853, Issue 87, GD:DX1901621767; *Ibid.*, 1 September 1873, Issue 324, GD:DX1901614499; *Ibid.*, 1 December 1874, Issue 339, GD:DX1901614788; ‘The Fashion’, *EDM*, 1 February 1863, Issue 34, p. 189, GD:DX1901422796; ‘Description of the Fashions and Needlework Engravings’, *EDM*, 1 November 1875, Issue 187/131, p. 258, GD:DX1902130887. Katherine Grier argues that comfort was a distinctively Victorian American middle-class state of mind. K. Grier, *Culture and Comfort: People, Parlors, and Upholstery 1850-1930* (New York, 1989), p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> ‘The Fashion’, *EDM*, 1 August 1864, Issue 52, p. 189, GD:DX1901417972; *Ibid.*, 1 July 1870, Issue 67/4, p. 32, GD:DX1901422361.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 May 1861, Issue 13, p. 67, GD:DX1901418588; *Ibid.*, 1 May 1862, Issue 25, p. 44, GD:DX1901422643; *Ibid.*, 1 May 1869, Issue 53, p. 257, GD:DX1901421615; ‘*La Mode*’, *LF*, 1 May 1870, Issue 332, GD:DX1901614658.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 December 1851, Issue 63, GD:DX1901621249; ‘The Fashions and Practical Dress Instructor’, *EDM*, [Date Unknown], Issue 9, p. 284, GD:DX1901533430.

<sup>41</sup> On taste, see J. Styles and A. Vickery, ‘Introduction’, in idem (eds.), *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America, 1700-1830* (2006), pp. 1-34 (pp. 14-21); A. Vickery, ‘Neat and Not too Showey: Words and Wallpaper in Regency England’, in *Ibid.*, pp. 201-222; Cohen; *Household Gods*, p. 19.



glance’.<sup>42</sup> *NMBA* declared that women could use their good sense and taste to modify the ornaments and materials of dresses, and *EDM* suggested that a dress that was ‘neither showy nor conspicuous’ showed good taste.<sup>43</sup> In other words, the best criterion for taste at of the time was ‘simplicity’.<sup>44</sup> Simplicity conveyed the idea of moral purity in the wearer, but it did not necessarily mean that the materials were any less ‘rich’ or ‘elegant’. The phrase ‘simple but elegant’ was extensively adopted for fashionable objects, and all considered simplicity was a top priority in dress for Victorian women, at least according to the literature discussed in Chapter One.<sup>45</sup> It is important to make it clear that for the middle-class woman of the period fashion was not in conflict with the ideal image of womanhood.

‘Economy’ was also frequently mentioned in fashion texts.<sup>46</sup> This suggests that fashionable women were indeed concerned with economy when it came to dress consumption, or else that women’s magazines imposed this view on their fashion columns in order to appeal to readers who wanted to save money. Mid-Victorian women’s magazines themselves acted as a form of ‘advice literature’, promising that to produce an ‘elegant’ and ‘stylish’ dress it was not necessary to have ‘expensive’ materials, though it is true that they rarely specified the price of these materials.<sup>47</sup> They promoted the idea that every woman concerned with economy could still afford a fashionable dress if she read the magazine tips. However, a fashionable dress was by no means inexpensive. In 1870, *EDM* claimed that it was ‘pleasant’, ‘convenient’ and ‘cheap’ for women to buy ‘ready-made’ dresses, but it avoided mentioning the problems

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<sup>42</sup> ‘*La Mode*’, *LF*, 1 August 1856, Issue 119, GD:DX1901619140.

<sup>43</sup> ‘The Toilet’, *NMBA*, February 1862, p. 110; ‘The Fashions’, *EDM*, 1 October 1875, Issue 186/130, p. 193, GD:DX1902130826.

<sup>44</sup> On the Victorian definition of ‘simplicity’, see Chapter 1, n. 24, p. 46.

<sup>45</sup> ‘The Fashions’, *EDM*, August 1861, Issue 16, p. 212; *Ibid.*, 1 April 1862, Issue 24, p. 279, GD:DX1901422626; *Ibid.*, 1 December 1864, Issue 56, p. 381, GD:DX1901418036; *Ibid.*, 1 August 1865, Issue 8, p. 254, GD:DX1901419905; *Ibid.*, 1 October 1869, Issue 58, p. 202, GD:DX1901421778; *Ibid.*, 1 December 1870, Issue 72, p. 352, GD:DX1901422506; *Ibid.*, 1 July 1875, Issue 183/127, p. 24, GD:DX1902130651; ‘*La Mode*’, *LF*, 1 October 1853, Issue 85, GD:DX1901621726; *Ibid.*, 1 March 1855, Issue 102, GD:DX1901618708; *Ibid.*, 1 February 1856, Issue 113, GD:DX1901618992; *Ibid.*, 1 January 1857 Issue 124, GD:DX1901619248; *Ibid.*, 1 June 1858, Issue 141, GD:DX1901619655; *Ibid.*, 1 July 1870, Issue 286, GD:DX1901608317, *Ibid.*, 1 April 1874, Issue 331, GD:DX1901614638.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 October 1861, Issue 181, GD:DX1901618290; *Ibid.*, 1 November 1862, Issue 194, GD:DX1901618607; *Ibid.*, 1 February 1863, Issue 197, GD:DX1901616310; *Ibid.*, 1 July 1868, Issue 262, GD:DX1901607911; *Ibid.*, 1 October 1871, Issue 301, GD:DX1901608544; *Ibid.*, 1 March 1873, Issue 378, GD:DX1901614391; ‘The Fashion’, *EDM*, 1 April 1863, Issue 36, p. 84, GD:DX1901422832; *Ibid.*, 1 August 1863, Issue 40, p. 189, GD:DX1901417782; *Ibid.*, 1 July 1868, Issue 43, p. 32, GD:DX1901421297; *Ibid.*, 1 December 1872, Issue 96, p. 320, GD:DX1901420795; *Ibid.*, 1 February 1873, Issue 98, p. 80, GD:DX1901420849;

<sup>47</sup> ‘The Toilet’, *NMBA*, January 1863, p. 53.

involved with ready-made clothes.<sup>48</sup> In 1873, *LF* claimed that “the combination of elegance and economy is the real ‘art of dress’”, clearly implying the difficulty in balancing ‘elegance’ and ‘economy’. The quality of being ‘useful’, which was emphasised in prescriptive literature, was also applied to fashion writing: a ‘useful dress’, which could easily go with other items, had a great many purposes, and would be suitable on ‘very many occasions’, which was clearly economically advantageous for women.<sup>49</sup>

Fashion in mid-Victorian women’s magazines appears largely to have followed the fashions of the aristocracy. Many fashionable items were named after royal figures, like the Victoria pelisse, the Alexandra *pardessus*, the Princess of Wales *fichu* and the Eugenie mantle.<sup>50</sup> In 1867, *EDM* even recommended to its readers the large warehouse *La Malle des Indes*, whose ‘principal designs have been chosen and bought by her Majesty the Empress Eugénie (1826-1920), Princess Mathilde, Queen Marie Anne of Austria, and the Queens of the Netherlands, of Wurtemberg, and of Saxony’.<sup>51</sup> This suggests that middle-class women readers were keen to use a shop where celebrities might go, and to buy objects which maintained the same quality appreciated by the rich and famous, as buying such items would highlight their social status and fashionableness. The word ‘ladylike’, too, was often used in fashion texts, indicating that middle-class women attempted to emulate the appearance of a lady, though the word was undoubtedly also used to mean simply ‘feminine’.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, women’s magazines seemed to expect their readers to have some knowledge of the history of fashion, including the Pompadour form, Louis XIII, the *corsage* of Louis XV, the Marie

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<sup>48</sup> ‘The Fashion’, *EDM*, 1 December 1870, Issue 72, p. 352, GD:DX1901422506. Until the 1870s, most ready-made women’s garments were loose and only semi-fitted. C. Breward, E. Ehrman and C. Evans (eds.), *The London Look: Fashion from Street to Catwalk* (2004), p. 37.

<sup>49</sup> ‘*La Mode*’, *LF*, 1 September 1873, Issue 324, GD:DX1901614499; *Ibid.*, 1 October 1858, Issue 145, GD:DX1901619754; ‘The Fashions’, *EDM*, 1 November 1860, Issue 7, p. 7, GD:DX1901418494; *Ibid.*, 1 June 1862, Issue 26, p. 92, GD:DX1901422661; *Ibid.*, 1 July 1863, Issue 39, p. 141, GD:DX1901417768; *Ibid.*, 1 April 1865, Issue 4, p. 126, GD:DX1901419827; *Ibid.*, 1 August 1867, Issue 32, p. 424, GD:DX1901418928.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 April 1862, Issue 24, p. 279, GD:DX1901422626; *Ibid.*, 1 October 1862, Issue 30, p. 284, GD:DX1901422726; ‘Our Coloured Plate’, *Ibid.*, 1 October 1862, Issue 30, p. 284, GD:DX1901422726; ‘*La Mode*’, *LF*, 1 May 1868, Issue 260, GD:DX1901607863.

<sup>51</sup> ‘The Fashions’, *EDM*, 1 July 1867, GD:DX1901418895.

<sup>52</sup> ‘*La Mode*’, *LF*, 1 September 1865, Issue 228, GD:DX1901617060; *Ibid.*, 1 August 1866, Issue 239, GD:DX19016173222; ‘The Fashions’, *EDM*, 1 September 1867, Issue 33, p. 480, GD:DX1901418959; *Ibid.*, 1 September 1869, Issue 57, p. 146, GD:DX1901421747; *Ibid.*, 1 April 1872, Issue 88, p. 224, GD:DX1901420560; *Ibid.*, 1 February 1874, Issue 110, p. 80, GD:DX1901421172; *Ibid.*, 1 February 1875, Issue 178/122, p. 80, GD:DX1902130363.

Stuart bonnet, the Marie Antoinette *fichu* and the Louis XIV sleeve.<sup>53</sup> This could be the reason why the reader-friendly magazine *EDM* provided articles on the history of costume, such as ‘Classical Dress’ and ‘Historical Dress’, in order to help its readers to fully understand the various styles of historical dress.<sup>54</sup>

The vocabulary of fashion often consisted of French terms, perhaps because Paris had long symbolised supreme taste and fashion.<sup>55</sup> Some words like *la mode*, *corsage* and *décolletage*, which had been used for centuries, could not alone lend magazines a reputation for high fashion, but their use does prove that English fashion was deeply affected by France. Other words used for textiles in the early mid-Victorian period, such as *satins à la reine*, *mouseline de soie*, and *soirée dansante*, implied French aesthetics, even though they were not necessarily produced in France or by the French. French titles somehow increased the value of fashionable objects.<sup>56</sup> It was assumed that readers could understand French, which was a mark of their accomplishment and social status. Apart from their reading ability, though, magazine language also reflected the fashion knowledge of its readers. Compared with *NMBA* and *LF*, *EDM* attempted to use easy terms to explain fashion, and yet in 1874 its editor commented that:

young students in geology must learn geological terms; [...] she who would wish to practise advantageously the science of dressmaking and the art of costume must consent to learn the terms employed by the artists who invent, design, and illustrate.<sup>57</sup>

The implication here is that fashion terms are not easy to understand, and that if women wanted to dress elegantly they would have to learn them.<sup>58</sup> In other words, wearing elegant and fashionable dress was an indicator of a woman’s intelligence.

The texts accompanying fashion plates were largely descriptive, focusing on providing fashion information, including styles, fabrics, colours, trimmings and

<sup>53</sup> ‘The Toilet’, *NMBA*, August 1852, p. 110; *Ibid.*, January 1854, p. 52; ‘The Fashion’, *EDM*, 1 March 1864, Issue 47, p. 237, GD:DX1901417895; *Ibid.*, 1 August 1868, Issue 44, p. 88, GD:DX1901421322; ‘La Mode’, *LF*, 1 November 1869, Issue 278, GD:DX1901608206.

<sup>54</sup> ‘Classical Dress’, *EDM*, 1 January 1875, Issue 177/122, p. 8, GD:DX1902130305; *Ibid.*, 1 February 1875, p. 71, Issue 178/123, GD:DX1902130359; *Ibid.*, 1 March 1875, p. 122, Issue 179/123, GD:DX1902130409; *Ibid.*, 1 April 1875, p. 186, Issue 180/124, GD:DX1902130466; 1 May 1875, p. 233, Issue 181/125, GD:DX1902130520; *Ibid.*, 1 July 1875, p. 20, Issue 183/127, GD:DX1902130649. ‘Historical Dress’, *EDM*, 1 September, 1875; p. 161, Issue 185/129, GD:DX1902130771; *Ibid.*, 1 October 1875, p. 214, Issue 186/130, GD:DX1902130833.

<sup>55</sup> In the Restoration, ‘French words for fashion and fashionable pastimes began to make an impact on the English language’. A. Ribeiro, *Fashion and Fiction: Dress in Art and Literature in Stuart England* (2005), p. 255.

<sup>56</sup> However, mid-Victorian English fashion was not just solely confined to its country of origin or to France, but also covered other Continental countries and the Orient, from the Middle East to the Far East.

<sup>57</sup> ‘The Englishwoman’s Conversation’, *EDM*, 1 July 1874, Issue 115, p. 54, GD:DX1901422855.

<sup>58</sup> Victorian girls were taught feminine-oriented subjects like sewing, morality, dress etiquette and fashion by their mothers or older sisters from an early age. See Chapter 4, p. 178.

accessories. For example:

Evening Dress – Robe of white tulle, over taffetas, the body fitting, and plain, with revers of formed of draperies, fastened on the shoulders, in order to display the short under sleeves; the skirt is double, the top one opened majestically *en tunique*, gathered up at distances with *agrafes* of flowers; a rich lace all round this skirt.<sup>59</sup>

Cunnington pointed out that early magazines were sparing in details and omit much that we need to know, such as how tight a *corsage* was, what kinds of plaits were used, or how long and wide a skirt was.<sup>60</sup> In his study of French fashion magazines of the late 1950s, Barthes commented that the ‘technological structure’ can only be the ‘real clothing’, whereas the ‘written clothing’ is there to signify the meanings and associations implied by the garment, rather than as a sewing programme.<sup>61</sup> His argument probably resulted from the fact that French fashion magazines in the late 1950s focused on selling ready-made clothes, and so they did not need to provide readers with details on sewing. The reason why these three sets of women’s magazines omit sewing details in fashion columns could be partly because *NMBA* and *LF* targeted richer and more fashionable middle-class women, and because such women would have preferred professionally-made dresses to self-made ones. On the other hand, *EDM* did offer sewing patterns, and added sewing details on the pages of sewing patterns to attract those women who did try to make their own dresses, rather than in fashion column.

Due to unclear descriptions, it is difficult for us to understand exactly how low a ‘low’ *corsage* was, and what the differences between a ‘moderately low’, ‘half low’ and ‘very low’ one were. However, the ‘low’ *corsage* of evening dresses, which originated from the style of formal court dresses, should not be regarded as a sexual or erotic expression of Victorian women. The low-cut dress was not used for all evening events, but only for large *soirées* or balls, and *EDM* frequently reminded its readers that with low-cut dresses, an over-body, such as a *fichu*, pelerine or short jacket, or else an undergarment chemisette, was required.<sup>62</sup> The words ‘elegant’ and ‘dainty’ were extensively applied to evening dresses, too, and the magazines generally tried to remind

<sup>59</sup> ‘Description of Engravings’, *LF*, 1 January 1851, Issue 5, GD:DX1901620951.

<sup>60</sup> Cunnington, *English Women’s Clothing*, p. 4.

<sup>61</sup> Barthes, *Fashion System*, p. 4. For Barthes, ‘technological structure’ meant a programme of manufacture. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>62</sup> ‘The Fashion’, *EDM*, 1 September 1860, Issue 25 p. 23, GD:DX1901418466; *Ibid.*, 1 June 1861, Issue 14, p. 117, GD:DX1901418602; *Ibid.*, 1 October 1861, Issue 18, p. 309, GD:DX1901418666; *Ibid.*, 1 June 1862, Issue 26, p. 92, GD:DX1901422661; *Ibid.*, 1 February 1863, Issue 34, p. 189, GD:DX1901422796; *Ibid.*, 1 December 1865, Issue 12, p. 382, GD:DX1901419974.

their readers that clothes did not serve only to highlight fashionableness, but also to present female 'modesty'. Descriptions of accessories were mainly made up of outdoor garments and headwear, but *NMBA* often included specific details on gloves, jewellery and footwear, though the latter was usually hidden by a long, full fashionable skirt. This implies that the readers of *NMBA* paid attention even to finer points that others might overlook, though perhaps the reason why *NMBA* provided more details of fashion accessories in the text of fashion plates was because it did not have a monthly fashion column.

With regard to dress, textile and colour terminology, *EDM* often clarified the function of each type of fashionable dress, such as the carriage dress, the concert dress and the walking dress. Dress terminology transformed 'fashion' into 'appropriateness', and reveals something of the everyday lives of readers and the social events which they enjoyed. It is possible that the use of dress terms was a strategy to urge women to purchase more items, given that women's magazines were in some sense there to promote the new apparel. Conversely, *NMBA* and *LF* did not usually point out the specific purpose of a dress, and sometimes even used two different terms to describe it, such as a home or walking dress, a country or seaside toilet, or an evening or opera dress.<sup>63</sup> This indicates either that English dress etiquette was much more complex than its French counterpart, or that the well-educated readers of *NMBA* and the fashion-conscious readers of *LF* themselves perceived what they should wear for all occasions. Similarly, the descriptions in *LF* barely discussed the colours of clothes, suggesting once more that its readers understood that dress colours had to harmonise with their complexion rather than simply make use of fashionable colours.<sup>64</sup> *EDM* readers, on the other hand, could depend on detailed descriptions of the latest fashions to make sure that they were fashionably and properly dressed for each occasion. It was, of course, possible that some readers read *EDM*, *LF* and *NMBA*, rather than only one of them.

Mid-Victorian women's magazines rarely named the dresses in as much detail

<sup>63</sup> 'The Toilet', *NMBA*, May 1862, p. 279; *Ibid.*, September 1866, p. 168; *Ibid.*, January 1868, p. 45.

<sup>64</sup> 'Pink and blue look well on blondes; and green and red on brunettes'. Rich colours harmonised with the rich tones of brunettes and with dark hair, while for blondes it was considered to be easier to choose colours. Delicate colours, such as light blue, pink, lilac and delicate shades of green, were seen as suitable for fair complexions, and sombre colours made dark complexions appear unhealthy. The complexion could be altered by the season and age, so a woman of taste would know how to change the colours she wore. Pink, for example, went well with a youthful, fair complexion, but not with a more yellowish one. *Etiquette for Ladies*, p. 14; Routledge, *Ball-Room Guide*, p. 12; Tickell (ed.), *Gentlewomen*, p. 15; 'Colour of Dress', *Manchester Times*, 16 August 1862, GD:BC3206410571; *Hand-Book of Etiquette*, p. 8; 'On the Unites of Dress and Contrast of Colour', *LT*, 1 August 1861, GD:DX1901524835; Philp, *Every-Day Book*, p. 310.

as early Victorian ladies' magazines did. Instead of using terms like 'breakfast dress', 'public breakfast dress', 'promenade dress' and 'public promenade dress', they were described more simply, as a 'visiting dress', or a 'walking dress'. However, this did not mean that the mid-Victorians paid any less attention to dress etiquette, compared with the early Victorians, but that the social lives of middle-class women were not as complex as those of upper-class women. From the 1860s onwards, women's magazines offered their readers more outdoor dresses, such as the 'bathing costume', 'swimming costume', 'seaside costume' and 'skating costume', suggesting that mid-Victorian women took part in more activities and sports, and that, in accordance with changes in dress, women's behaviour also changed in certain ways.

The fabric used was also considered to be a key factor in the construction of the modernity and perceived quality of a dress.<sup>65</sup> In 1852, a letter from Geraldine Jewsbury to Jane Carlyle describes how she bought beautiful pink brocaded silk which originally cost nine guineas, but was only charged £3.5s., simply because the material was out of fashion.<sup>66</sup> This clearly shows that the specific fabric used generated a sense of 'fashion' in dress. Light materials such as muslin and flimsy dresses presented an image of softness and freshness, and were well suited for the summer season,<sup>67</sup> while black silk mantles were not advisable as spring and autumn wear, and 'rich' materials such as moiré and fur were reserved for indoor or evening wear.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, these three mid-Victorian women's magazines did not provide much information on the real nature of textiles, and indeed rarely specified the texture of the materials, such as weave patterns and printed motifs. This might suggest that most middle-class women readers were interested in what a fashionable dress looked like, but not in its texture. The greatest difficulty, in any case, in reading nineteenth-century texts is that a significant number of contemporary fabric names can no longer be recognized nowadays, and the shade of colour described in the texts might well be different from current usage.

In brief, mid-Victorian fashion texts show that a fashionable dress was required not only to look beautiful, but also to display good taste and appropriateness. Cost and utility, too, were significant factors in the purchase decision, and these key concerns were also addressed in the works of prescriptive literature.

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<sup>65</sup> In contrast to the cut and silhouette of dress, the pattern designs for fabrics changed on a yearly basis.

<sup>66</sup> Ireland (ed.), *Jewsbury to Carlyle*, p. 435, B&I:S4830-D125. For the content of the letter, see Introduction, p. 16.

<sup>67</sup> 'La Mode', *LF*, 1 June 1852, Issue 69, GD:DX1901621387; *Ibid.*, 1 June 1853, Issue 81, GD:DX1901621646.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 July 1866, Issue 238, GD:DX1901617297; *Ibid.*, 1 May 1851, Issue 56, GD:DX1901621063.

## Fashion in Images

*The Lady's Magazine or Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex* (1770-1832) was the first English publication to publish hand-coloured plates.<sup>69</sup> However, since fashionable contemporaries always felt that French fashions were superior to English ones, after 1785 most women's magazines started to reproduce or import French plates.<sup>70</sup> EDM, for example, worked with the engraver of the Paris magazine *Le Moniteur de la Mode*, Jules David (1808-92), and many charming fashion plates of the French Colin sisters, Héloïse Leloir (1820-75), Laure Noël (1821-78) and Anaïs Toudouze (1822-99), were widely copied or reproduced by English and American periodicals.<sup>71</sup> Though these fashion plates were drawn by female artists, feminist historians have argued that their work followed the male perspective of their father, Alexandre-Marie Colin (1798-1875).<sup>72</sup> This section will now explore how fashion plates reflected the social concepts of the time as regards physical beauty, leisure activities and up-to-date consumer products.

Fashion plates mainly served to display fashionable dresses, hairstyles and accessories with a view to encouraging women to order them, but such images also expressed the cultural and social values of the time.<sup>73</sup> Mid-Victorian fashion plates obviously focused on a particular social concept of physical beauty, namely young white women of the leisured classes, with slender figures and small waists, though little

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<sup>69</sup> Adburgham, *Women in Print*, p. 205. Historians have stated that the fashion plate first appeared in the eighteenth century. Moore, *Plates*, pp. 11-12, 14; Holland, *Plates*, p. 48; Taylor, *Study of Dress*, p. 135; C. Breward, *Fashion* (Oxford, 2003), p. 116. John Lea Nevinson, on the other hand, argues that fashion plates originated in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. J. L. Nevinson, *Original and Early History of Fashion Plate*, pp. 67-78, <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/34472/34472-h/34472-h.htm>> [accessed 12 December 2012] Aileen Ribeiro, meanwhile, claims that fashion plates were first published in the seventeenth century. Ribeiro, *Fashion and Fiction*, pp. 17-19. I shall not discuss here when the fashion plate first appeared, but I use fashion plates issued with mid-Victorian women's magazines to explore the culture and taste of middle-class women at the time. On decorated plates, see A. Dolan, 'An Adorned Print: Print Culture, Female Leisure and the Dissemination of Fashion in France and England around 1660-1779', *V&A Online Journal*, 3(2011), <<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/research-journal/issue-03/an-adorned-print-print-culture,-female-leisure-and-the-dissemination-of-fashion-in-france-and-england,-c.-1660-1779>> [accessed 4 August 2012]

<sup>70</sup> Moore, *Plates*, p. 15.

<sup>71</sup> For details of the Colin sisters, see V. Steele, *Paris Fashion: A Culture History* (Oxford, 1998), 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., pp. 102-111; Holland, *Plates*, pp. 146, 151.

<sup>72</sup> K. J. Bohleke, 'Americanizing French Fashion Plates: Godey's and Peterson's Cultural and Socio-Economic Translation of *Les Modes Parisiennes*', *American Periodicals: A Journal of History, Criticism, and Bibliography*, 20:2(2010), 120-155(p. 121).

<sup>73</sup> As English publications copied fashion plates from France, fashion plates in England did not function as they did in France, where specific fashion shops were marked. H. Hahn, 'Fashion Discourses in Fashion Magazines and Madame de Girardin's *Lettres parisiennes* in July-Monarchy France (1830-48)', *Fashion Theory*, 9:2(2005), 205-228(p. 220). Despite the lack of specific details of fashion houses in English fashion plates, Englishwomen could still purchase in shops similar patterns of fabrics to those shown in fashion plates, as these either imported French products or sold fakes produced by English manufacturers.

girls were often portrayed together too.<sup>74</sup> In contrast, elderly women, coloured women and servants were barely shown.<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, the women shown in plates had an almost identical pretty face, featuring large, lively eyes, a straight nose, pink cheeks, and small ears and mouth, with cherry lips (Figure 2-2).<sup>76</sup> Their movements were easy and flexible in character, and they did not lie down, sprawl or slouch. When sitting, they did not show bare legs, which would have been immodest. Boardman goes on to declare that women in plates ‘never look directly out to the reader and they often look out to the side, but whatever the direction of the look, it is never directly toward the viewer and the gaze is always averted’.<sup>77</sup> This probably indicates the Victorian feminine ideal of shyness and modesty, yet fashion plates, like the fashion photographs of today, were also inclined to show fashionable items from different viewpoints. As Valerie Steele points out, ‘rather, they are mannequins, whose function is limited to wearing clothes’.<sup>78</sup> ‘They tend to be at medium distance from one another, so that none of them obliterates the costumes of her companions.’ They do not ‘interact with one another, but simply to be in proximity’.<sup>79</sup> Even so, it is my view that, in order to sell fashion, the figures, dresses, postures, props and settings in fashion plates were arranged intentionally. Although the women in the plates might not always have eye contact with each other, one was often shown observing the other’s dress (Figure 2-3), indicating that moral and physical beauty, as well as taste, were strongly controlled by the social community.

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<sup>74</sup> *Punch* claimed that ‘a small waist is elegant’. ‘Multiple Essay Item’, *Punch*, 10 July 1847, GD:DX1901564602. Until the 1860s, periodicals did not really focus on young women readers, as occurred later in publications like *The Young Englishwoman* (1864-77), *The Young Ladies’ Journal* and *The Lady’s Own Paper* (1866-72). Young unmarried women enjoyed less financial support than married women.

<sup>75</sup> In late Victorian periodicals, servants were sometimes illustrated, perhaps because uniform became popular for female domestic servants.

<sup>76</sup> L. Montez, *The Arts of Beauty* (1858), pp. 9-10. On beauty and cosmetics, see S. J. Downing, *Beauty and Cosmetics 1550-1950* (Oxford, 2012); A. Ribeiro, *Facing Beauty: Painted Women and Cosmetic Art* (2011).

<sup>77</sup> Boardman, ‘Material Girl’, pp. 98-99.

<sup>78</sup> Steele, *Paris Fashion*, p. 111.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.





Permission to use this image not granted.

Fig. 2-2 The Beauty of Mid-Victorian Fashion Plates, *NMBA*, February 1852, ML.

Fig. 2-3 The Standing Women Observing the Seated Women's Dress and Fan, *LF*, 1 November 1868, Issue 26, GD:DX1901608000.

Fashion plates revealed something of the desirable lifestyle and leisure activities of middle-class women.<sup>80</sup> Mid-Victorian fashion plates often depicted either two women with a little girl, or three women, which might reflect the fact that women's magazines suggested that Victorian women should do things together, instead of alone, or that women themselves preferred doing things in small groups. These women in turn acted as the female role model for the little girl. Karin Bohleke argues that women in nineteenth-century American fashion plates were depicted indoors or in domesticated outdoors settings to represent 'Mother Nature', but women in mid-Victorian English fashion plates tended to represent female sociability rather than domestic femininity.<sup>81</sup> For instance, they were illustrated as receiving guests in a drawing room, dancing in a ballroom, shopping (Figure 2-4), or attending outdoor activities (Figure 2-5).<sup>82</sup> Women in plates were not portrayed as passive objects but as enjoying their lives, while women in photographs, on the other hand, seemed to lack confidence and were not so lively, something which could well be attributable to the technological problems of photography at the time.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>80</sup> These might not, of course, reflect the life experience of every reader.

<sup>81</sup> Bohleke, 'Americanizing', p. 124.

<sup>82</sup> Early fashion plates were often blank and consisted of one figure (See Figure 2-2). This was partly due to engraving techniques.

<sup>83</sup> Women could be represented more vividly in paintings than in plates or photographs.



Fig. 2-4 Women Doing Window Shopping, *EDM*, 1 March 1866, WM.

Permission to use this image not granted.

Fig. 2-5 Women Playing Tennis, *EDM*, 1 July 1871, Issue 79, GD:DX1901422008.

Mid-Victorian fashion plates did not emphasise the flesh but the figure, exhibiting a respectable femininity in place of sexuality or sensuality. They aimed to guide women as to what to wear on specific occasions, though some women's magazines only offered one fashion plate per edition, in which they tended to include both day and evening dresses. In this case, the setting could only correspond to the dress

of one of the figures. It is noticeable, too, that women in mid-Victorian fashion plates never wore trousers or an undergarment alone. Women shown outdoors either wore long-sleeved dresses, or were covered by outdoor garments, and bonnets were an essential accessory (Figure 2-6). Women attending evening parties, on the other hand, wore low-cut, short-sleeved dresses that showed their bare shoulders and arms but not the bosom (Figure 2-7).<sup>84</sup> Their hair was not hidden under caps, but adorned with ribbons, lace or flowers. They wore a minimal amount of jewellery, as a profusion of jewellery was considered vulgar. Interestingly, gloves, which were recommended for well-off women to wear all the time in order to keep their hands soft and white, were sometimes not visible in plates. This may have been the result of communication failure or the use of careless non-professional hand-colourists, who forgot to draw or colour gloves.<sup>85</sup>



Fig. 2-6 The Grey *Barège* Dress and Emerald Green Silk Dress, *NMBA*, July 1861, CM.

Fig. 2-7 The Ball Dress and Evening Dress, *EDM*, 1 February 1862, ML.

Cultivated women in mid-Victorian plates were often shown drawing, painting, playing music (Figure 2-8) or visiting galleries, in contrast to photographs, in

<sup>84</sup> By the mid 1860s, the evening gloves ‘had lengthened to four, five or six buttons’, and by the 1870s, they were worn larger than ever, and with eight or ten buttons for ball dresses. Walkley and Foster, *Crinolines*, p. 87.

<sup>85</sup> Owing to the use of non-professional colourists, the colours in fashion plates might not correspond to those described in texts.



which women often held or read a book.<sup>86</sup> Women's magazines may have presented women doing more sophisticated activities than reading partly because the 'angel's education' was considered only necessary in relation to their home life, and they were not required to learn anything in depth or on abstract subjects.<sup>87</sup> It is possible that reading was regarded as a personal leisure activity, whereas fashion plates often depicted social activities among women,<sup>88</sup> perhaps because such events involved more than one woman and so more dresses could be shown in the plate. Social activity may also be seen as the fundamental arena for the display of clothes. Women in plates were usually accompanied by flowers, which signified Victorian femininity and gentility. Learning botany was considered ladylike, and herbs were not only used for cooking but also in medicinal home remedies,<sup>89</sup> though women were not, of course, professionally trained to be botanists.<sup>90</sup> Bohleke argues that, to portray the ideal of womanhood, American women were expected to find emotional fulfilment through their children, and so American publications altered the French fashion plates in which the mothers were not shown with their children.<sup>91</sup> Again, Steele reminds us that 'figures shown in plates are not really sisters, the little girl is no one's daughter'.<sup>92</sup> In English fashion plates, it was not necessary for adult women to look directly at a child, but they were believed to love children, to help the poor (Figure 2-9), and to have a passion for animals, particularly birds and dogs. These qualities all display feminine naivety, kindness, loveliness and thoughtfulness. Nevertheless, a respectable woman had to avoid dressing luxuriously when visiting the poor, as otherwise they might be regarded as hypocrites who only did philanthropic work because it gave them an excuse to go out or helped them to acquire a good reputation, but they were not sincere.

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<sup>86</sup> The music hall was the popular culture of the nineteenth century. P. Bailey, 'Custom, Capital and Culture in the Victorian Music Hall', in R. D. Storch (ed.), *Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth-Century England* (1982), pp. 180-208.

<sup>87</sup> Peterson, 'No Angels', p. 689. On Victorian education, see J. N. Burstyn, *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood* (1980).

<sup>88</sup> Of course, women could also read together as a group activity.

<sup>89</sup> Botanical knowledge was also an accomplishment for a polite woman in the eighteenth century. On women and botany, see A. B. Shteir, *Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science: Flora's Daughters and Botany in England, 1760-1860* (1996); B. Henrey, *British Botanical and Horticultural before 1800* (1975).

<sup>90</sup> Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 310.

<sup>91</sup> Bohleke, 'Americanizing', p. 125.

<sup>92</sup> Steele, *Paris Fashion*, p. 111.

Permission to use these images not granted.

Fig. 2-8 The Woman Playing the Piano, *LF*, 1 May 1863, GD:DX1901616394.  
 Fig. 2-9 Two Women Visiting the Poor, *LF*, 1 October 1871, GD:DX1901608545.

The three mid-Victorian magazines selected here, *NMBA*, *LF*, and *EDM*, rarely issued the same fashion plates, in contrast with the early Victorian periodicals, which frequently published the same plates. This reflects the fact that these periodicals targeted slightly different groups of middle-class women, and so each publication collected the most suitable images for its readers. It also expresses how competitive the market for women's magazines was: each magazine had to print its own exclusive plates to maintain the interest of their readers. An ever greater number of plates were in circulation, too, because of the expansion of print culture. Victorian women 'no longer had to rely on verbal directions to the dressmaker about the appearance of a finished costume, but could give her a hand-coloured fashion-plate instead'.<sup>93</sup> However, fashion plates were regarded as primarily for visual pleasure, and therefore the dresses drawn in plates tended to be more magnificent than 'simple' in style, in contrast to what was extensively advised in fashion texts. It was inappropriate, for example, to wear a full, trained skirt for outdoor activities, according to Victorian dress etiquette, but in Figure 2-10, two women, who are wearing a wide, long skirt and a walking and a travelling dress respectively, are buying train tickets, accompanied by a girl. This could be because plate artists tended to highlight the silhouette to attract readers' attention, even though the crinoline was gradually going out of fashion by 1866, and certainly some

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<sup>93</sup> Ashelford, *Art*, p. 203.

dress historians have commented that plates often displayed overstatement. We can thus see why it would have been dangerous for a Victorian woman to refer to fashion plates alone when ordering a new dress, especially if her dressmaker or tailor also lacked knowledge of dress etiquette and a sense of fashion.



Fig. 2-10 The Walking Dress (left) and Travelling Dress (right), *EDM*, 1 June 1866, WM.

In short, fashion plates are an indicator not only of fashionable dress and of female beauty, but also of social life. There can be no doubt that hand-coloured fashion plates provided readers with excellent images of dress, but to be a fashionable and respectable Victorian woman, the reader had to combine the images with textual descriptions to avoid misreading fashion plates.

### **Fashion in Surviving Clothing**

The majority of mid-Victorian dresses were custom-made, with only a few outdoor garments and headwear ready-made. Surviving dresses, which often lack the details of the wearer, such as social class, age and religion, as well as data on when they were made and how they were worn, cannot by themselves give a full picture of Victorian women's clothes culture, but they provide hints as to the figure and taste of the wearer, the material of the dress, and details of sewing techniques such as machine stitching, machine-made lace and alterations, which can only be derived from the analysis of the objects themselves. Moore commented that the smallest waists in her 'collection are not less than twenty-one inches. And these are far below the average, which for young

women's clothing was twenty-four'.<sup>94</sup> This section will consider how middle-class women readers applied the magazine fashions to their actual dresses, and what surviving dresses tell us about the fashion practices of mid-Victorian women. In *Victorian Costume*, Buck notes that:

fashion plates are the sensitive record of fashion changes, but much of the detail, the lesser changes, the extravagancies, reached only a small proportion of Victorian costume. Throughout the whole period, almost all the fashion plates are of French origin and the number of women in this country who dress like the fashion plates and followed their slightest changes was always very small.<sup>95</sup>

However, most surviving day dresses covered by my research are decorated with fashionable elements of their time. Indeed, they are much simpler than the images shown in fashion plates, but then 'simplicity' plays a key role in mid-Victorian fashion text. If we intend to decode the real fashions adopted by middle-class women, it is important that texts, images and objects should not be studied separately.<sup>96</sup>

'Elegant simplicity' was the principle behind mid-Victorian women's day dresses.<sup>97</sup> 'Greater simplicity of taste' referred to suitability according to the age and status of the wear. For example, a young unmarried woman who dressed in a matronly dress and ornaments lost 'the charm of elegant simplicity'.<sup>98</sup> Firstly, both dresses in Figures 2-11-A & B are not only trimmed with fringes, but are also cut in similar colours or patterns of fabrics to those shown in fashion plates, proving that middle-class women chose or modified fashionable dresses according to their social status and the limitations of their budget. The luxurious green velvet dress (Figure 2-12), on the other hand, is cut in a fashionable *Caraco* bodice and trimmed with rich fringes, and is accompanied by a mantle of the same material: this is believed to have been for winter promenade wear, and to have belonged to a much wealthier woman. This sumptuous object is the most unusual one to be unearthed in the course of my research. In Figure 2-13-A, the middle of the bodice of the cream silk dress is adorned with bows of ribbon and a waistband of ribbon with a bow and long ends. Compared with Figures 2-13-B & C, Figure 2-13-A could have been used for both visiting and small dinner parties, which

<sup>94</sup> D. L. Moore, *The Woman in Fashion* (1949), Illustrated with Costumes from the Author's Collection, Photographed by F. Fonteyn, p. 17.

<sup>95</sup> Buck, *Victorian Costume*, p. 8.

<sup>96</sup> The refurbished Room 40: Fashion Galleries in V&A does not just display historical dresses, but also combines other contextual objects such as paintings, fashion plates, photographs, fashion dolls, textiles, wallpaper and furniture to help visitors to understand the relationship between dress and its social context.

<sup>97</sup> 'The Toilet', *NMBA*, July 1857, p. 53.

<sup>98</sup> 'La Mode', *LF*, 1 December 1870, Issue 291, GD:DX1901608390.

implies that middle-class women might have preferred to order a multi-function dress.<sup>99</sup> This dress also shows that the wearer negotiated her own individuality and fashionableness.



Fig. 2-11-A\_The Blue Striped Dress Trimmed with Fringes, RH:54/1963, *NMBA*, January 1851;  
B\_ The Brown Striped Dress Trimmed with Fringes, RH:30/1967/3/1, *NMBA*, February 1855.

<sup>99</sup> Mrs Shackleton collected her clothing style and fashion information from pocket books published in London, and pasted similar fashion plates into her diaries. As Vickery comments, 'Mrs Shackleton was not a slavish imitator of elite modes, nor a passive victim of the velocity of fashion'. A. Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England* (1998), p. 178.





Fig. 2-12 The Green Velvet Dress and Mantle Trimmed with Fringes, V&A:T.324B-1977(1855-57).



Fig. 2-13-A\_ The Cream Dress Trimmed with Bows of Ribbon and A Waistband of A Similar Ornament, RH:104/1936/1; B\_ The Visiting Dress, *NMBA*, February 1854; C\_ The Toilette for A *Soirée*, *NMBA*, April 1856.

Moreover, middle-class women seemed to adopt fashions in their most durable form. With regard to Figure 2-14-B, the grey dress is delicately trimmed on the body with embroidery and *passementerie*, and the upper parts of the sleeves and the Swiss belt bear similar ornamentation. By comparison, the surviving dress (Figure 2-14-A) is simply trimmed with tassels on the upper parts of the sleeves and a tassel waistband.

Grey symbolised modesty, dignity, reliability and durability.<sup>100</sup> Another example, Figure 2-15-A, shows almost the same style of cut as Figure 2-15-B. The difference is the colour of the dress. Though mauve was fashionable, it faded easily, and this could have been one reason why the wearer chose brown, which was durable and represented earthliness and health.<sup>101</sup> With a large clothing budget, women could of course choose their favourite colours to express their taste rather than displaying their economical character. In Figure 2-16-A, for example, the middle of the bodice of the light green moiré dress trimmed with braid and accompanied by a golden buckle belt is similar to the style of Figure 2-16-B, and despite the fact that in this case brown was not only durable but also fashionable, the wearer still preferred green. Green was the symbol of mirth, hope, tenderness and prosperity, and was also the colour of Venus, the Roman goddess of love and beauty.<sup>102</sup> *Taste versus Fashionable Colours, a Manual for Ladies, on Colour in Dress* (1863), by the successful architect William James Audsley (1833-1907), declared that green and gold formed a rich harmony which worked better than green associated with other shades of the same colour.<sup>103</sup> This dress also suggests that the wearer or her dressmaker had good taste, by contemporary standards.



Fig. 2-14 A\_ The Grey Dress Trimmed with Tassels, RH:201/1972/35; B\_ *NMBA*, March 1863.

<sup>100</sup> On grey, see also Chapter 1, pp. 48-49.

<sup>101</sup> Sylvia, *How to Dress Well*, p. 115.

<sup>102</sup> Audsley, *Taste versus Fashionable Colours*, p. 51.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.





Fig. 2-15 A\_ The Brown Dress Trimmed with Bands, RH:26/1986; B\_ EDM, February 1864.

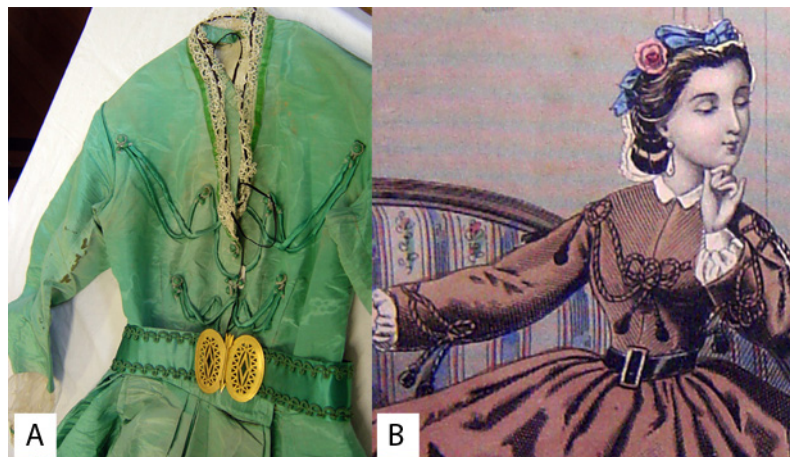


Fig. 2-16 A\_ The Light Green Dress Trimmed with Braid and the Buckled Belt (c. 1865), FM: without access no.; B\_ *Le Mode Elegant*, September 1864.

Mid-Victorian middle-class women favoured simplicity rather than luxury in evening dress. Out of the 270 surviving dresses in my research, only 23 are made in the style of the evening dress. There are two examples made to a similar design to those shown in fashion plates. One (Figure 2-17-A) is the lilac silk dress, trimmed with a net of black machine lace, where the machine-made lace might suggest that the wearer had a limited budget, which could also explain why the dress is simpler than that of Figure 2-17-B. The wearer could have been expecting a child or may have had limited self-control as regards eating, as the waist of the dress measures around 36 inches. The other (Figure 2-18-A), a pink dress with a two-flounced skirt, is best regarded as a wedding dress, circa 1860: the upper flounce has ornamented lace around the hem, while the lower one is trimmed with floral patterns and braid. The low bodice is cut with a pointed waist, the *berthe* is finished with a fringe, and three bouquets of red roses are placed on the bodice. It is quite similar to the style of Figure 2-18-B, introduced in

1854, which may indicate that there was a gulf between magazines and real fashion, despite the fact that evening dress style changed only slightly between 1850 and 1865, in contrast with that of day dress. Compared with Figure 2-18-A, the plain blue Grosgrain Dress in Figure 2-19 is cut with a long train bordered with braid and accompanied by a plain jacket and a detached collar trimmed with lace, suggesting that this dress probably belonged to a young unmarried woman, and that some Victorian women did follow the advice of magazines to cover the upper body when wearing a low bodice. Conversely, in Figure 2-20, the low bodice and small puffed sleeves of the blue brocade dress are delicately trimmed with lace and bands of ribbon, the gored skirt is ornamented with bands of ribbon around the bottom, and the ribbon waistband is fastened with a small bow at the front of the bodice. This dress could have been worn by a young matron, though these case studies seem to suggest that younger women had more opportunities to attend evening parties.



Fig. 2-17 A\_ The Lilac Silk Dress Trimmed with Black Machine Lace, RH:87/1976;  
B\_ *NMBA*, April 1853.





Fig. 2-18 A\_ The Pink Floral Patterns of Dress, ML:36.78/3; B\_ *NMB4*, August 1854.



Fig. 2-19 The Plain Blue Grosgrain Dress with Jacket and Collar, RH:83/1967/1-3.



Fig. 2-20 The Blue Brocade Trimmed with Lace, FM:BA1.09.1313.

The study of surviving dresses reveals that mid-Victorian women seemed to prefer to order dresses made up of both day and evening bodices.<sup>104</sup> A multiple-bodice dress saved Victorian women money, which they could perhaps spend on another wider skirt. It was also easier for them to change, particularly when they were on a visit or attending a party at a friend's house, implying that this kind of evening dress would have been more practical than one designed specifically for the evening alone, though it would by no means be unfashionable. In Figures 2-21-A, the evening bodice is trimmed with a *berthe* of lace, and ruched with a green ribbon V at the front, and the skirt has three scalloped flounces. The jacket form and the scalloped flounced sleeves of the green silk dress are decorated with fringes. In Figure 2-22-A, the day bodice is bordered with black lace around the top and two rows of blue ribbon trimming round the square neckline, while the evening bodice is trimmed with a *berthe* made of blue ribbon, beads and black lace. The sleeves are also trimmed with corresponding ornamentation. The trained gored skirt is trimmed with three rows of blue ribbon, an overskirt form. Indeed, most of the surviving dresses from the early and mid-1860s in my research are trimmed with a counterfeit overskirt instead of a double or treble skirt, as this was a common way for Victorian women to economise, by reducing the amount of costly fabric required.

<sup>104</sup> A surviving multiple-bodice dress could be dated accurately if compared with a single-bodice dress.





Fig. 2-21 A\_ The Green Silk Dress, ML:76/45/1; B\_ *NMBA*, October 1854; C\_ *NMBA*, July 1862.



Fig. 2-22 A\_ The Grey Poplin Dress, RH:2/1962/2; B\_ *NMBA*, March 1867.

Not every fashion illustrated in plates can be found in surviving dresses. For example, no woman's waistcoat from the early 1850s (Figure 2-23) has survived in my case studies, though this does not necessarily mean that waistcoats were not adopted by women.<sup>105</sup> It is possible that a well-fitting waistcoat had to be made by a tailor, and so it was either too expensive or was passed down to the woman's descendants until it wore out. Presumably, too, most Victorian women were still too conservative in the 1850s to follow male fashion. On 7 April 1852, a letter from the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-61) to Mary Russell Mitford (1787-1855) comments that:

her [a Frenchwoman] usual costume is both pretty and quiet, and the fashionable waistcoat and jacket (which are a spectacle in all the 'Ladies'

<sup>105</sup> On women's waistcoats, see Chapter 5, pp. 213, 227.

companions' of the day) make the only approach to masculine *wearings* to be observed in her. She has great nicety and refinement in her personal ways, I think, and the cigarette is really a feminine weapon if properly understood.<sup>106</sup>

This letter describes a 'new' Frenchwoman who smoked a cigarette and who had adopted the waistcoat.<sup>107</sup> There are no examples of dresses in my research cut in the princess seam style, which could be because such a style of dress required more fabric than one cut with a seam at the waistline. Compared with dresses, too, small accessories have often been lost. For instance, the Swiss belt was a very popular accessory in 1860s fashion plates (Figure 2-14), but in my research, there is only one surviving object (Figure 2-24), and one photograph showing a woman wearing a Swiss belt (Figure 3-22).<sup>108</sup>



Fig. 2-23 The White Waistcoat, Made with Deep Flaps and Pockets, *NMBA*, October 1851.



Fig. 2-24 The Moiré Swiss Belt, V&A:T:115-1979.

<sup>106</sup> E. B. Browning, *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, Vol. 2 (1897), p. 63, B&I:S4398-D021.

<sup>107</sup> Until the late 1880s, smoking was considered to be the province of 'fast' women.

<sup>108</sup> There are also five photographs published by secondary sources which show a Swiss belt, an item that was often worn by young women.





Fig. 2-25 The White *Gros de Tours* Wedding Dress, *NMBA*, January 1854.

Fig. 2-26 The Pale Blue Wedding Dress, *BM:CST.410*.

The wedding dresses shown in fashion plates (Figure 2-25), which were always white, are also very different from most surviving dresses.<sup>109</sup> A white dress cut in the style of an evening dress was not easy to reuse on other occasions, so most mid-Victorian brides chose either the fashionable colour of the time or their own favourite colour for their wedding dress, which was made up in the style of a day dress.<sup>110</sup> This would then serve as their best dress after the wedding. Until the end of the nineteenth century, few middle-class brides chose to wear white. Blue, however, was not an unusual colour for wedding dresses in the mid-Victorian period. In Figure 2-26, a pale blue silk dress, trimmed with three flounces, is considered to be a wedding dress, circa 1857. The two Victorian sayings ‘something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue, and a silver sixpence in her shoe’, and ‘Marry in blue, lover be true’ suggest that a Victorian bride was supposed to wear blue on her wedding day

<sup>109</sup> Wedding dresses are likely to prove useful for studying dress history, because such subjects often contain details of the item’s history, such as who wore it and when it was worn. In my research, there are thirteen wedding dresses: four in white (*BM:2002.15.1*, *CST*, *WAG:60.225.19*, *V&A:T.43&A-1947*, and *V&A:T.37&A-1951*), three in blue (*BM:CST.410*, *FM:BATMC1.28.31*, and *RH:59.1965.6*), two in brown (*ML:84/291* and *BH:TA2519*), one in cream (*RH:98/1963/1*), one in pink (*ML:36/78/3*), one in lilac (*BM:CST.405*) and one in mauve (*V&A:T.182&A-1914*). Few people would choose purple for their wedding dress as it was thought to express sorrow and sadness, and was often adopted for half mourning. On mourning dress, see Chapter 1, pp. 61, 64-65.

<sup>110</sup> On the history of the wedding dress, see E. Ehrman, *The Wedding Dress 300 Years of Bridal Fashions* (2011).

for good luck.<sup>111</sup> Blue was considered heavenly and spiritual, and symbolic of divinity, intelligence, sincerity and tenderness.<sup>112</sup> In ancient Roman times, blue represented love, modesty and fidelity, and in Christianity blue symbolised the Virgin Mary, purity and loyalty.<sup>113</sup> Betty Wood, an author specialising in the area of colour healing and auras, has pointed out that blue not only carries with “its cultural association with ‘truth, revelation, wisdom loyalty, fertility, constancy, and chastity’”, but also connects with ‘the feminine principle, the Great Mother [...] comfort, peace, compassion, healing’.<sup>114</sup>

Wedding dresses apart, fashion plates did tend to reflect the fashionable colours worn by mid-Victorian women.<sup>115</sup> In 1856, the young English chemist William Henry Perkin (1838-1907) discovered the first aniline colour called mauve (Figure 2-27).<sup>116</sup> After 25 January 1858, when Queen Victoria wore a mauve dress to her daughter’s wedding, mauve rapidly gained in popularity all over the country. In 1859, *Punch* commented that it was like an outbreak of ‘Mauve Measles’:

the first symptoms by which the malady declares itself consists in the eruption of a measly rash of ribbons, about the head and neck of the person who has caught it. The eruption, which is of a mauve colour, soon spreads, until in some cases the sufferer becomes completely covered with it. Arms, hands, and even feet are rapidly disfigured by the one prevailing hue, and strange as it may seem, the face even looks tinted with it.<sup>117</sup>

Shades of purple were indeed everywhere. It has been pointed out that purple was unserviceable by gaslight, and yet mauve was widely recommended by magazines for

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<sup>111</sup> ‘Marry in white, everything’s right/ Marry in blue, lover be true/ Marry in pink, spirits will sink/ Marry in grey, live far away/ Marry in brown, live out of town/ Marry in green, ashamed to be seen/ Marry in yellow, ashamed of your fellow/ Marry in black, wish you were back/ Marry in red, wish you were dead/ Marry in tan, he’ll be a loved man/ Marry in pearl, you’ll live in a whirl’. During the mid-Victorian period, green was very common for women’s dresses, but it was thought to be unlucky for a wedding dress unless the bride was Irish. A green wedding dress was believed to be a symbol of lost virginity. A girl dressed in a ‘green gown’ implied promiscuity, the green stains being due to rolling in grassy fields. Though there are many green dresses in my research, none of them is marked as a wedding dress. *OED* <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/276142?redirectedFrom=green%20gown#eid>> [accessed 2 July 2011] It is hard to trace accurately the origin of this tradition, but this proverb was certainly in use by the late Victorian period and was printed in an 1894 edition of the Pennsylvania newspaper, *The Warren Ledger*, where it was listed as a ‘Puritan Marriage Custom’. The sixpence was a silver coin which was in use in Britain from 1551 to 1967. A sixpence in the bride’s shoe represented wealth and financial security. In the late nineteenth century, ‘every girl likes to get married in white’. See J. R. Gillis, *For Better, for Worse: British Marriages, 1600 to the Present* (Oxford, 1985), p. 287.

<sup>112</sup> ‘Shadow and Substance’, *The Monthly Packet of Evening Readings for Younger Members of the English Church*, 1 October 1861, Issue 130, p. 389, GD:DX1902025516.

<sup>113</sup> S. T. Manning, *The Color of Truth* (Dooagh, Achill Island, 2007), 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., p. 92; D. Fontana, *The Secret Language of Symbols: A Visual Key to Symbols and their Meanings* (1993), pp. 66-67.

<sup>114</sup> Manning, *Color*, p. 49.

<sup>115</sup> It is not my intention to discuss here all the fashionable colours that appeared in women’s magazines, but only those that had recently come into fashion.

<sup>116</sup> On bright colours in Victorian women’s dresses, see Breward, *Culture of Fashion*, pp. 161-162.

<sup>117</sup> ‘The Mauve Measles’, *Punch*, 20 August 1859, p. 81, GD:DX1901551974.

evening dresses.<sup>118</sup> Figure 2-28, for example, is a mauve moiré evening dress trimmed with black lace, and in Figure 2-29 the maternity dress is made of a fashionable bright purple wool trimmed with brown bands, and the back of the jacket is cut in two layers, while the maternity jacket was normally cut full and loose. This may suggest that the wearer was a follower of fashion.<sup>119</sup>



Fig. 2-27 The Aniline Purple Silk Day Dress (1868-70), V&A:T122-1934.

Fig. 2-28 The Aniline Purple Silk Evening Dress, BH:TC472.

Fig. 2-29 The Purple Maternity Dress, WM:69/413.142.

<sup>118</sup> Audsley, *Taste versus Fashionable Colours*, p. 39.

<sup>119</sup> From the 1860s onwards, wool became a popular choice. D. T. Jenkins, *The British Wool Textile Industry 1770-1914* (1982), p. 95. The material also kept pregnant women warm.

In 1859, *The Habit of Good Society* claimed that ‘rich colours have been selected as the appropriate tints for that middle age which is so beautiful in English women alone’.<sup>120</sup> In *St. James’s Magazine* of 1861, the chemist and photographer Robert Hunt (1807-87) also claimed that the most admired tones were mauve and magenta.<sup>121</sup> In the 1860s, the French philosopher, historian and critic Hippolyte Taine (1828-93) put forward the criticism that ‘there was a quantity of violet dresses, of a really ferocious violet’; ‘purple or poppy-red silks, grass green dresses’ and ‘azure blue scarves’; ‘dress of purple silk, very shiny so that they reflect the light dazzlingly, or of stiff tulle on a substructure of skirts, bristling with embroidery; immense shawls of black lace falling to the heels, immaculate white or bright purple gloves [...] the glare and glitter is brutal’.<sup>122</sup> He concluded that ‘there can be no doubt that there is something peculiar in the condition of the English retina’.<sup>123</sup>

Mauve had ushered Victorian Englishwomen into a new era of bright colours in dress.<sup>124</sup> In 1858, the writer and father of British Egyptology, John Gardner Wilkinson (1797-1875), argued that ‘bright colours are not necessarily gaudy. It is when bright colours are put together without due regard to their suitableness to each other’.<sup>125</sup> By the 1860s, aniline blues were widely available, and blues increasingly became brighter. Figure 2-30, the rich blue moiré silk day dress is depicted as Miss Janet Gilbert’s trousseau, while Figure 2-31, the bright blue silk taffeta dress, was worn by Miss Matilda Braddon for her wedding to Mr Joseph Sanford in Exeter on 10 October 1866. BH also has several mid-Victorian dresses made in bright blues, such as Figure 2-32. *A Manual of Etiquette for Ladies* declared:

in one place there is a demand for high-coloured goods, and in another these goods could scarcely find a purchaser, but the demand would be nearly all for neutral tints; in other words, the ladies in one, exercise a coarse, indiscriminate taste, and in the other they are more refined in judgment.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>120</sup> *Good Society*, p. 174.

<sup>121</sup> *OED*, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/115212?redirectedFrom=mauve#eid>>[accessed 1 July 2011]

<sup>122</sup> H. Taine, *Taine’s Notes on England* (1995), trans. with An Introduction by E. Hyams, pp. 20, 46, 57.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263. On 18 May 1859, the American actress and writer Olive Logan (1839-1909) pointed out that ‘English ladies coming to Paris are astonished at the quantity of black used by the French ladies in almost every article of their dress’. Chroniqueuse, *Photographs of Paris Life: A Record of the Politics, Art, Fashion, and Anecdote of Paris during the Past Eighteen Months* (1861), p. 17. Chroniqueuse was Logan’s pseudonym.

<sup>124</sup> For early Victorian women, quiet and neutral tints were the norm. ‘Dark menswear signifies work, the world of work and professional dignity, the brightness of women’s clothes is not hard to understand: the professions, and most jobs, were closed to women’. Harvey, *Men in Black*, p. 195.

<sup>125</sup> J. G. Wilkinson, *On Colour and on the Necessity for A General Diffusion of Taste among All Classes* (1858), p. 1.

<sup>126</sup> ‘A Lady’, *Manual*, p. 15.



However, it is difficult to judge whether urban women had a stronger preference for bright colours than countrywomen, because museums collected objects from different areas, and in addition the objects often lack details of the wearer.



Fig. 2-30 The Rich Blue Moiré Day Dress (c. 1858), V&A:T.90&A-1964.

Fig. 2-31 The Bright Blue Silk Taffeta Dress, RH:59.1965.6.

Fig. 2-32 The Bright Blue Day Dress, BH:TA2925.

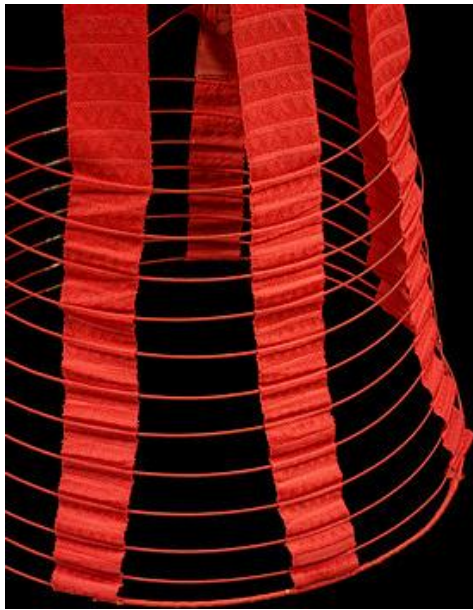


Fig. 2-33 The Scarlet Little Cutaway Jacket, *EDM*, 1 September 1864, LM.

Fig. 2-34 The Red Zouave Jacket (1866), ML:37.129-5.

Fig. 2-35 The Red Crinoline, V&A:T.51-1980.

Red, including scarlet, crimson and magenta, was considered to be an aggressive, powerful and ostentatious colour, and so it was often associated with the uniform or cloak of a hero, warrior or military man.<sup>127</sup> In the Bible, red was associated with masculinity, blood, war and sin (Isaiah 1:18). Women who wore a red dress were usually associated with lust and sex, and in early Victorian women's magazines, there were few fashionable dresses in red.<sup>128</sup> From the late 1850s, though, not only were new colours introduced, but female fashion began to be influenced by the military, and reds became fashionable for women's dress (Figure 2-33). Figure 2-34 depicts a red Zouave jacket, which originated in the French army (from the Algerian Kabyle tribe of Zouaous), trimmed with black braid. The other fashionable red object was the Garibaldi shirt, which was inspired by the Italian patriot Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-82), which became popular after the Empress Eugenie of France wore it in 1860. Red was even

<sup>127</sup> N. Arch, 'The Wearing of the Red: the Redcoat and the British Brand', *Costume*, 41(2007), 99-104.

<sup>128</sup> However, a red cloak was a traditional garment of the English countrywoman in the eighteenth century. A. Buck, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century England* (1979), p. 130.

used for undergarments, which were often made in white and signified cleanliness and purity.<sup>129</sup> The red crinoline in Figure 2-35 was made by the largest crinoline company, W. S. & E. H. Thomson.<sup>130</sup> The use of novel bright colours offered mid-Victorian middle-class women a distinctive sense of modernity.

However, orange was considered simply too bright to be elegant for a woman's dress, though it appeared to its 'advantage when in small quantities and associated with its contrasting colours blue and purple'.<sup>131</sup> Yellow seldom went well with any complexion, and for this reason it was considered to be a sign of poor health, plague and heresy,<sup>132</sup> and it also had other negative connotations, such as dishonesty, jealousy, envy and betrayal. In *The Woman in White* (1860), the popular novelist Wilkie Collins (1824-89) used the white dress to symbolise innocence and goodness in his heroines Anne Catherick and Laura Fairlie, while Laura's dark and voluptuous half-sister Marian Halcombe was described as wearing a rich yellow evening dress. It is true, though, that yellow was considered appropriate for evening dress.<sup>133</sup> In the series of 'Meredith Chichester' in *EDM* (1863), the heroine's husband exclaimed 'in a voice so harsh and discordant she [Meredith] could scarcely recognise it again; when there are so many other colours to choose from, why must you deck yourself out in that wretched yellow gown?'<sup>134</sup> A writer in the 1870s declared that 'orange and the most aggressive yellows were regarded with disfavour; they seemed to imply a degree of animal passion which the pure ought not to possess'.<sup>135</sup> Out of 270 surviving dresses, there are none in yellow or orange, which might suggest that mid-Victorian women rarely chose to wear a yellow dress because they knew how to dress to suit their complexion and skin, or else that they wished to avoid being judged by others.

To sum up, mid-Victorian middle-class women were not passive readers of fashion, and did not feel any need to dress exactly like the images shown in fashion plates. In contrast, they modified their dress, used it to express their individual

<sup>129</sup> Some crinolines were made in purple, see MCG:1961.8 (1865-67).

<sup>130</sup> In 1860, *EDM* stated that 'magenta is the favourite shade for coloured petticoats this winter'. 'The Fashions', *EDM*, 1 December 1860, Issue 8, p. 93. GD:DX1901418509.

<sup>131</sup> Audsley, *Taste versus Fashionable Colours*, pp. 33, 49.

<sup>132</sup> Philp, *Every-Day Book*, p. 310; L. R. Aiken, *Dying, Death, and Bereavement* (Mahwah, NJ, 2001), 4<sup>th</sup> edn., p. 60. 'In the Middle Ages heretics were obliged to wear yellow. In periods of plague, yellow crosses were used to identify contagious areas'. G. Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art* (1955), 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., p. 275.

<sup>133</sup> Audsley, *Taste versus Fashionable Colours*, p. 30.

<sup>134</sup> 'Meredith Chichester; A Tale of our own Times', *EDM*, 1 April 1863, Issue 36, p. 264, GD:DX1901422827.

<sup>135</sup> Cunningham, *English Women's Clothing*, p. 16.

preferences, and chose affordable or durable colours, styles, and material that suited their complexion and social status.

## **Conclusion**

In mid-Victorian women's magazines, fashion text made an important contribution to the make-up of fashionable clothes, and also played a role in constructing women's concept of what fashion was. To be fashionable, a middle-class woman had not just to pay attention to looking beautiful and up-to-date, but her dress also had to show good taste and propriety, and prove comfortable and economically advantageous. A fashionable woman who could balance fashion with moral values and dress etiquette was not in opposition to the ideal image of the middle-class woman.

Mid-Victorian fashion plates express an ideal of young white female beauty and elegant manners, and represent a female social world where women enjoyed their leisure activities and appropriate philanthropic ones, rather than the world of domestic femininity. However, the dresses depicted in fashion plates were often overstated, and to avoid misreading fashion images middle-class women had to look at visual material as well as textual description. Similarly, to acquire a deeper understanding of dress history, historians too must study texts as well as images and objects.

I am not in agreement with Buck's contention that only a small number of English women dressed like the fashion plates during the Victorian period. Looking at surviving clothes can give a different perspective on this issue. According to my research, most middle-class women did follow fashion, and their day dresses were decorated with similar trimmings to those shown in fashion plates, though they did tend to be much simpler than those of the plates. However, simplicity and elegance were key concerns in mid-Victorian fashion texts, and this could certainly suggest that middle-class women did refer to textual descriptions. It is also clear that they did not copy fashion plates slavishly, but were used to modifying fashion according to their own tastes. It is possible that their choices were mainly due to their limited clothing budget: to prolong the life of their clothes and to save money, middle-class women attempted to choose durable colours and material to make a multi-function dress. They would order a dress that consisted of a day and an evening dress, and inevitably this kind of evening dress would be much simpler than one designed for the evening alone. Most mid-Victorian wedding dresses were cut in the colour and style of a day dress, instead of a fashionable white evening dress, which might explain why there are few evening dresses in my research sample, and imply that middle-class women either rarely



attended evening parties, or did not feel that they had to dress specifically for them. What is clear though, above all, is that the bright colours of surviving dresses clearly indicate that middle-class women did follow the latest fashions in the mid-Victorian era, which contributed to a sense of modernity.

Women's magazines, fashion plates and surviving dresses all give us a sense of the way middle-class women valued their clothes, and how they negotiated fashion, morality and budgetary limitations. How middle-class women wore and behaved in their dresses has so far remained unclear, though, and the following chapter will use historical studio photographs as a means of revealing how middle-class women dressed and behaved, and how femininity was represented.

### Chapter 3

## Women in Photographs: Communication, Representation and Fashion

In October 1865, Mrs Jane Carlyle wrote a letter to her paternal aunt Elizabeth Welsh (d. 1877), stating that:

I am very glad indeed of the photograph, and grateful to you for having had it done at least, knowing how all such little operations bore you. It is very satisfactory as a portrait too – very like and a pleasant likeness – ‘handsome and ladylike’ (the epithets that used to be bestowed on you in old times). Photography is apt to be cruel on women out of their teens; but this one is neither old-looking nor cross-looking. So thank you again with all my heart.<sup>1</sup>

This letter suggests that not everyone could look pretty in photographs, presumably unlike in paintings or sketches, but Jane herself was very satisfied with this photograph. Being photographed was a modern life experience for the middle classes of the mid-Victorian period. Even though middle-class men and other social classes also liked to have their photographs taken, middle-class women were considered to be the main consumers of photographic images.<sup>2</sup> This raises the questions of what middle-class women used their personal photographs for, how they presented themselves or were represented in photographs, and what photographs can reveal about middle-class women’s fashion and their identity. This chapter constitutes the first known study of the communicative value and fashioning of such photographs, and of how they displayed the fashions of English middle-class women.

As regards the use of photographs in the history of dress, Alison Gernsheim was the first British dress historian to study photographs in 1963, arguing that photographic images present the reality of fashion history, rather than the fantasy shown in fashion plates.<sup>3</sup> Her study provides readers with plenty of historical images, but neglects the possible problems of historical photographs. Although from the 1980s onwards more dress historians have used historical photographs for studying dress history, the images studied have mainly been of the Royal Family and of prominent celebrities, politicians and the rich, and have been treated as illustrations to complement the text.<sup>4</sup> *Camera Lucida* (1981) by Roland Barthes, on the other hand, reminds us that

<sup>1</sup> J. A. Froude (ed.), *Letters and Memorials of Jane Welsh Carlyle, Vol. 2* (New York, 1883), p. 353, B&I:S4445-D169.

<sup>2</sup> J. Tucker, ‘Gender and Genre in Victorian Scientific Photography’, in A. Shteir and B. Lightman (eds.), *Figuring it Out: Science, Gender, and Visual Culture* (2006), pp. 140-163(p. 144).

<sup>3</sup> A. Gernsheim, *Victorian and Edwardian Fashion: A Photographic Survey* (1981), p. 21. It was originally published as *Fashion and Reality* in 1963.

<sup>4</sup> E. Owen, *Fashion in Photographs, 1920-1940* (1993); K. Rolley and C. Aish, *Fashion in Photographs 1900-1920* (1992); S. Levitt, *Fashion in Photographs 1880-1900* (1991); M. Lambert, *Fashion in Photographs 1860-1880* (1991); A. Lansdell, *History in Camera: Seaside Fashion 1860-1939* (Princes

in a photograph, *studium* (denotation) and *punctum* (connotation) are inseparable.<sup>5</sup> The *studium* refers to the cultural, social or political representation of a photograph, while the *punctum* refers to a private meaning that attracts and holds the viewer's gaze. The philosopher Vilem Flusser makes the point that a photograph represents an image of a concept, but not the reality or the person photographed.<sup>6</sup> *Eyewitnessing* (2006), by Peter Burke, also argues that the photograph is not a 'mirror of reality', but a carefully-staged construction of reality and social propaganda.<sup>7</sup>

The recent studies of Audrey Linkman have centred on the social history of nineteenth-century British photography, and Linkman notes that nineteenth-century art photographers, such as Oscar Gustave Rejlander (1813-75), Henry Peach Robinson (1830-1901) and Dr Barnardo, employed models, provided settings and props and arranged their poses to imitate the stereotypes of the working classes. In contrast, the photographs of Peter Henry Emerson (1856-1936) aimed to capture natural surroundings rather than to create artificial ones.<sup>8</sup> Rachel Worth argues that the photographs taken by Robinson, for instance, do not depict reality, but instead express the picturesque side of rural life: he dressed his models in country clothes and sun bonnets.<sup>9</sup> After studying a wide range of nineteenth-century photographs (1840-1900), Joan Severa concludes that, at least in America, fashion was not restricted to the wealthy, and that middle-class women too could dress fashionably.<sup>10</sup> A similar study of middle-class Englishwomen is, however, yet to be published.

To remedy this shortage in scholarship, this chapter brings together 754 studio photographs from four institutions: FM (171), PDVA (208), RH (54) and WM (321). The photograph collections in question include the products of more than 82 studios in 45 British counties, as well as five foreign countries. A significant number of examples were black-and-white *cartes-de-visite*, while a few were hand-coloured photographs (9), daguerreotypes (5), ambrotypes (4) and cabinet cards (18). In addition to these, over

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Risborough, 1990); idem, *Fashion À La Carte 1860-1900: A Study of Fashion through Cartes-De-Visite* (Princes Risborough, 1985); idem, *History in Camera: Wedding Fashions 1860-1980* (Aylesbury, 1983); C. Walkley, *Dressed to Impress: 1840-1914* (1989); Ginsburg, *Photographs*.

<sup>5</sup> G. Batchen, 'Palinode: An introduction to Photography Degree Zero', in idem (ed.), *Photography Degree Zero: Reflections on Roland Barthes's Camera Lucida* (2009), pp. 3-30.

<sup>6</sup> V. Flusser, *Towards A Philosophy of Photography* (Gottingen, 1984).

<sup>7</sup> P. Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Use of Images as Historical Evidence* (2006), pp. 21-23, 120-122.

<sup>8</sup> A. Linkman, *The Expert Guide to Dating Victorian Family Photographs* (Manchester, 2000); idem, *The Victorians: Photographic Portraits* (1993); idem, 'The Workshy Camera: Photography and the Labouring Classes in the Nineteenth Century', *Costume*, 25(1991), 36-52(pp. 37-39, 49).

<sup>9</sup> R. Worth, 'Representations of English Rural Working-Class Dress and the Photography of Henry Peach Robinson', <<http://www.vub.ac.be/C-HIM/attachments/papers/Rachel.pdf>>[accessed 12 December 2012]

<sup>10</sup> J. L. Severa, *My Likeness Taken: Daguerreian Portraits in America* (2005); idem, *Dressed for the Photographer: Ordinary Americans and Fashion 1840-1900* (1995).

three hundred examples were taken from the VAO (158) and from published books, but these were used only for reference purposes.

The first English daguerreotype studio was opened in London in 1841 by Richard Beard (1801-85), who charged one guinea for a 1 1/2 x 2 inch portrait.<sup>11</sup> The market for photography at that time was obviously firmly focused on the upper and upper middle classes. A decade later, though, the Great Exhibition of 1851 extended the new technology of photography to a wider public, and photography began to attract more attention. A broad range of publications published columns, articles and advertisements related to photography, including publicity for photographic apparatus and albums,<sup>12</sup> and a number of institutions in London began to offer public photography programmes.<sup>13</sup> There were many well-known Victorian amateur photographers, such as Julia Margaret Cameron (1815-79), Viscountess Clementina Hawarden (1822-65) and Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (pseudonym Lewis Carroll 1832-98), but this chapter will concentrate on photographs taken by professionals.<sup>14</sup> It is important to note that most amateurs were from the upper middle classes, and so their snapshots tended to portray a particular section of high society.

In the 1860s, *cartes-de-visite* (2 1/4 x 3 1/2 inches mounted on 2 1/2 x 4 inch visiting cards) were the first mass-produced photographs.<sup>15</sup> A set of a dozen small prints cost from half to one guinea, depending on the skill and reputation of the photographer, while individual prints cost from one to two pence for monochrome, and from four to six pence for hand-coloured.<sup>16</sup> A wider range of social classes could therefore be photographed. In London, the number of studios grew from 66 in 1855 to 147 in 1857, and then to 168 in 1861, and to 284 by 1866. In Manchester, the numbers

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<sup>11</sup> H. Gernsheim, *A Concise History of Photography* (1965), p. 62. The daguerreotype had a patent in England, but not in America, and so more Americans were able to have daguerreotype-photographs taken.

<sup>12</sup> From the 1840s onwards, it was also common for photographers to publish their own books illustrated with photographs, such as Talbot's *The Pencil of Nature* (1844-46) and *Sun Pictures in Scotland* (1845).

<sup>13</sup> Lambert, *Photographs*, p. 10; H. Gernsheim, *The History of Photography, Vol. 2: The Rise of Photography 1850-1880* (1988), pp. 19-20.

<sup>14</sup> Linkman has argued that 'throughout the nineteenth century commercial portrait photographers regularly attended on their customers at home. Their photographs were normally taken outside in the garden or backyard, or at the front door or garden gate'. A. Linkman, 'Summary: Inside Jobs: Commercial Portrait Photography in the Victorian Home', 1-4 (p. 1). <[historiessofhomessn.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/adurey-linkman-summary.pdf](http://historiessofhomessn.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/adurey-linkman-summary.pdf)>[accessed 29 November 2012] However, it was uncommon for the mid-Victorian middle classes to have a photograph taken either in their home or outdoors.

<sup>15</sup> In 1854, in Paris, André Adolphe Disderi (1819-90) patented a multi-lensed camera which could produce eight small likenesses from one large glass negative.

<sup>16</sup> The additive colour process was first used in 1861 by the Scottish theoretical physicist James Clerk Maxwell (1831-79).

increased from 17 in 1855 to 71 in 1865.<sup>17</sup> The number of professional photographers in England expanded from 51 in 1851 to between 2,500 and 2,900 in 1861, and by the mid-1860s there were around 42 studios in Regent Street, London, most of which offered *cartes-de-visite*. Nearly 400 million *cartes* were sold in England every year.<sup>18</sup> In 1866, cabinet-sized photographs (5 1/2 x 4 inches mounted on 6 x 4 1/2 inch cards) were introduced, and this style became increasingly popular in the period between 1870 and 1914.

Though historical photographs may sometimes be problematic, photographic evidence, together with other factual and visual evidence, is useful for revealing the values and attitudes of mid-Victorian women.<sup>19</sup> This chapter is divided into three sections to investigate how mid-Victorian studio *cartes-de-visite* visualised the appearance and clothing of middle-class women. The first section uses newspapers, women's magazines, letters, diaries and notes on photographic cards to reveal the way middle-class women used their personal photographs to communicate with their relatives, friends and lovers, with the aim of developing an understanding of why Victorian sitters dressed and posed as they did. The second section explores how historical photographs represent the ideology of middle-class womanhood, in six fields: young women, middle-aged women, older women, sisterhood and friendship, courtship and motherhood.<sup>20</sup> The section also compares and contrasts how female beauty was depicted in photographs, paintings and fashion plates, and includes cartoons from *Punch* which show the photographer instructing his sitter in how to pose, as well as the potential reaction when a woman received her unflattering photograph. By exploring how the photograph operated as a means of representation for women, the chapter will shed light on the significance of dress in photographs. It will be shown that photographs should not simply be viewed as indicators of what people chose to wear, but how they (and photographers) constructed an image and a sense of self and the role that dress played in this. The third section examines how middle-class women used dress to

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<sup>17</sup> Lambert, *Photographs*, pp. 10-11; Lansdell, *À La Carte*, p. 11; Gernsheim, *Photography* (1965), p. 118.

<sup>18</sup> Ginsburg, *Photographs*, p. 13; D. B. Thomas, *Science Museum Photography Collection Catalogue* (1969), p. 65; Gernsheim, *Photography* (1965), p. 118.

<sup>19</sup> John Tagg argues that photographs 'are never evidence of history; they are themselves the historical'. J. Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Basingstoke, 1988), p. 65.

<sup>20</sup> This chapter does not focus on photographic images of young girls because they were considered almost like dolls, to be dressed up by their parents and set to pose by photographers. See L. Vallone, 'Reading Girlhood in Victorian Photography', *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 29:2(2005), 190-210; L. Smith, *The Politics of Focus: Women, Children and Nineteenth-Century Photography* (Manchester, 1998).

represent their identity, and the differences between fashion in photographs, magazines and reality.

### Communication through Photographs

On 1 November 1865, a reader of *EDM* named 'Aminda' enquired whether it was right for a woman to ask a gentleman for his *carte-de-visite*. The editor replied that it was hard to answer the question, given that Aminda had not mentioned who the gentleman was, whether he was a relative or friend, how old he was, and whether he was married or single. Aminda did also state that she did not need the photograph for anything in particular, and so the editor replied with the question: if so, why did you need to ask for a photograph?<sup>21</sup> This letter shows something of the new means of exchange and communication that photography had created, and how people were uncertain of how these fitted into gender etiquette. This section, therefore, aims to examine what mid-Victorian women used their personal photographs for and why they collected them, with a view to helping us to understand how and why they dressed up and performed in studio photographs, which will be discussed in the following sections.

One article in *Melbourne Punch* of 1856 stated clearly that *cartes-de-visite* were commonly regarded as visiting cards, and suggested that the names of the sitters should be printed on the cards.<sup>22</sup> For the mid-Victorians, therefore, *cartes-de-visite* used as portrait miniatures were not only an area for personal leisure, but also a tool for social communication.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, many of my research samples were marked with a small note on the reverse side of the photographic cards, some of which noted that the women's portraits were circulated among family members and friends. For example, Figure 3-1 is inscribed 'For Mamma, Love, Lily', and Figure 3-2 'Ann Ison - my nurse at Market Bosworth, A. J. H'.<sup>24</sup> Obviously, some of these texts are too limited in extent to help us to clarify who the sitter was and what kind of the relationship existed between the sender, the receiver and the sitters. Figure 3-3, for instance, is marked 'Dear Mrs Bayly, with the [...] love of the original'.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, one historical album from PDVA, which contains 24 photographs from several named sitters such as C. Siby, H. P.

<sup>21</sup> 'The Englishwoman's Conversazione', *EDM*, 1 November 1865, Issue 11, p. 352, GD:DX1901419956.

<sup>22</sup> 'My Carte-De-Visite', *Melbourne Punch*, 9 March 1865, p. 81, GD:CC1903448006.

<sup>23</sup> See K. Rieder, 'Gifting and Fetishization: the Portrait Miniature of Sally Foster Otis as A Maker of Female Memory', in Goggin and Tobin (eds.), *Women and Things*, pp. 247-264; M. Pointon, "'Surrounded with Brilliants': Miniature Portraits in Eighteenth-Century England", *The Art Bulletin*, 83(2001), 48-71; Linkman, *Photographic Portraits*.

<sup>24</sup> FM:BA95/450W; WM:61/830A.

<sup>25</sup> WM:P9316.

Robison and Mrs Calvary, might be seen to illustrate the phenomenon of Victorian interest in collecting photographs, but it is unlikely to be useful for defining the relationships between these female sitters and the collector.<sup>26</sup>



Fig. 3-1 The Photograph Sent to the Sitter's Mother, R. W. Thrupp, Birmingham, FM:BA95/450W.



Fig. 3-2 The Sitter Noted as A Nurse, R. Hellis, London, WM:61/830A.

<sup>26</sup> PDVA:X25 (1857-65). For more extensive discussion of the significance of text in images, see R. Preston, "‘Hope you Will Be Able to Recognise us’: the Representation of Women and Garden in Early Twentieth-Century British Domestic Real Photo Postcard", *Women's History Review*, 18:5(2009), 781-800.





Fig. 3-3 The Photograph Sent to Mrs Bayly, [Anon.], WM:P9316.

Despite the lack of visual images, evidence from Victorians' letters and diaries reveals the way in which women collected their relatives' and friends' photographs and their feelings about the photographic portraits. On 9 May 1874, a letter written from George Eliot to her niece Edith Evans Griffiths read as follows:

many thanks for the photographs which I am delighted to have. [...] I will ask Mr Lewes about the possibility of sending his *carte-de-visite*. I am sure he will send it at your request if he happens to have a copy remaining.<sup>27</sup>

This letter shows the enthusiasm of mid-Victorian women for photography, and the fact that some might have prepared copies of their photographs at home for exchanging. Photographs were seen as a modern form of expression and communication. Another letter that Eliot wrote to her 'grandson' Roland Stuart, on 21 July 1874, goes as follows:

thanks! You are brave fellow for sending me your Mother's [Elma Fraser Stuart (1837-1903)] photo, and have given me real pleasure. The likeness is as good as I can imagine any likeness to be.<sup>28</sup>

This might indicate that photographic technology was not fully developed, and because of this Victorians were curious about their own photographic images and those of others. The majority of her contemporaries, such as Mrs Jane Carlyle and Mrs Elizabeth Browning, were interested in circulating their personal photographs, though Eliot

<sup>27</sup> Haight (ed.), *Eliot, Vol. 6*, pp. 45-46, B&I:S7137-D049.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71, B&I:S7137-D075. Elma was a passionate fan of George Eliot, and Eliot called her sweet name- daughter.



herself always avoided being photographed.<sup>29</sup> In a letter to her friend, the American author Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-96) on 24 June 1872, she described how she felt selfish, particularly when her friends or relatives asked for a photograph.<sup>30</sup> Photographs were viewed as not just as objects, but as the symbols of an act of exchange, which represented middle-class social or community values, and this could explain why Eliot felt selfish because she collected friends' and relatives' photographs, but had no photographs of herself to give in return.

In Victorian times, photography was a fashionable social practice. On 28 August 1861, a letter from Elizabeth Gaskell to her friend, the American author, social critic and professor of art Charles Eliot Norton (1827-1908), stated that:

your photographs (apparently sent last Xmas) arrived here while we were at Silverdale. How grand and beautiful they are! Just what I care for and value; independently of the giver. Thank you so much my dear Mr Norton.<sup>31</sup>

It is unclear whether Mr Norton sent these photographs as a Christmas gift to Mrs Gaskell or not, but in 1859 a letter from him to Mrs Gaskell mentions:

a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, - for you each and all. [...] Will you please me by accepting them [a set of photographs of the Adirondack, taken in this summer and autumn during a long stay among the mountains by his friend Stillman], & let them count among your Christmas presents?<sup>32</sup>

Although a set of photographs was not a self-portrait as such, Mr Norton seems to have chosen to send Mrs Gaskell photographs as a Christmas gift. This could reflect descriptions or advertising in magazines and newspapers stating that photographic albums and apparatus, as well as photographs themselves, always made good birthday, wedding, Christmas or New Year gifts. According to the theory of gift exchange of the French anthropologist Marcel Mauss, the giver does not just give an object, but also part of the giver, and this is why Mrs Gaskell wrote 'what I care for and value; independently of the giver'.<sup>33</sup> Likewise, on 6 January 1863, Mrs Jane Carlyle sent Dr James Russell (born c. 1798) a letter with a photograph that she had promised him,

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<sup>29</sup> This does not mean that Eliot was never photographed. A photograph of Eliot was hung in the Brays' dining room, and her close friend Miss Hennell wrote to Eliot on 1 October 1859: 'though I do rather grieve to change its place, we have agreed that it should come to my bedroom for the present'. Haight (ed.), *Eliot*, Vol. 3, B&I:S7134-D167. The reason why Eliot rarely had her photograph taken could be because she was sensitive about her appearance (she had a large nose).

<sup>30</sup> Haight (ed.), *Eliot*, Vol. 5, B&I:S7136-D298.

<sup>31</sup> J. Whitehill (ed.), *Letters of Mrs Gaskell and Charles Eliot Norton, 1855-1865* (1932), B&I:S7066-D029.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, B&I:S7066-D016.

<sup>33</sup> M. Mauss, *The Gift: the Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (2002), with A Foreword by M. Douglas. It was first published as an essay in *L'Année Sociologique* in 1923-24, later republished as a book in 1950, and translated into English in 1954. Whitehill (ed.), *Letters of Mrs Gaskell*, B&I:S7066-D029.

noting that the photograph was supposed to have been given to him on New Year's Day, but that it had taken her longer to transfer the photograph as the sheet of millboard had run out.<sup>34</sup> This implies that some Victorian women liked to decorate their photograph cards and albums, and as Patrizia Di Bello points out, album-making and collecting was a form of female culture which can be quite revelatory about personal and social experiences.<sup>35</sup> The last example (Figure 3-4), which was inscribed 'Mary Capon, 16 years in our family, 1862', could be seen as a gift to celebrate and mark a servant's long-term service to the family, revealing the good relationship between the sitter and the family.<sup>36</sup> This image also carried an inscription recording sixteen years of invisible memories between the sitter and the family. As Pierre Bourdieu noted, a photograph meant a souvenir.<sup>37</sup>



Fig. 3-4 The Photograph Inscribing 'Mary Capon, 16 years in our family', 1862, Rosslyn, Brighton, WM:62/491.

Personal photographs were also tokens of admiration. Middle-class wives liked to share their husband's photographs with friends, as can be seen in an example sent by Mrs Carlyle to her husband on 11 July 1858, indicating that his Russian

<sup>34</sup> Froude (ed.), *Carlyle, Vol.2*, p. 249, B&I:S4445-D119.

<sup>35</sup> Robin and Carol Wichard state that from the 1860s onwards 'special printed mounts offered birthday or Christmas'. R. and C. Wichard, *Victorian Cartes-De-Visite* (Princes Risborough, 1999), p. 16. On women and album making, see P. D. Bello, *Women's Albums and Photography in Victorian England: Ladies, Mothers and Flirts* (Aldershot, 2007).

<sup>36</sup> WM:62/491.

<sup>37</sup> C. Metz, 'Photography and Fetish', *October*, 34(1985), 81-90(p. 82). See P. Bourdieu, *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art* (Cambridge, 1990).

translator had arrived that day. ‘The best that I could do for him was to give him a photograph of you because he admired you so much’.<sup>38</sup> The Russian translator might not have asked for a photograph, but Mrs Carlyle believed that people would admire or be a fan of her celebrity husband. Another letter, from Mrs Frederick Lehmann to her husband Paul on 23 January 1867, described how Mrs Lewes (George Eliot):

thought you so handsome. I could not remember the word she used for your head. She did not like the one she had but admired your ‘head-medallion’ photo so much, so I had to give it to her and please send me another.<sup>39</sup>

In this letter, Mrs Lehmann could not help but give the ‘head-medallion’ photo to Mrs Lewes, revealing that she was proud that her friend admired her husband. In the final example, George Eliot sent her ‘husband’s’ photograph to her friend Mrs Karl von Siebold in 1871, accompanied by a note that it was not a favourable image of Mr Lewes.<sup>40</sup> ‘He had much better likenesses of himself produced. But we were not at town, so we could only send you what we had at hand’.<sup>41</sup> While in Eliot’s letter she did not mention that her friend admired Mr Lewes, she did imply that her ‘husband’ himself looked much better in reality than in the photographic image she was sending. This passing of their husbands’ photographs on to their friends suggests that Victorian wives felt great admiration for their husbands, and perhaps they were also interested in making visual comparisons.

In addition, Victorians collected from strangers.<sup>42</sup> An advertisement called ‘Your Future Husband or Wife’s True *Carte De Visite*’, published in 1867, declared that:

Mr Hind, The Celebrated Astrologer, will send the true *carte-de-visite* of your intended, with Name, Age, and the date of Marriage, for Sixteen Stamps. Three questions answered for 2s. 6d. State age and sex. Send stamped directed envelope. [...] Published, ‘The Guide to Astrology’ post free, 13 stamps.<sup>43</sup>

Whether or not Mr Hind could offer the ‘future husband or wife’s true *carte-de-visite*’, this advertisement shows that photographs provided a way to satisfy Victorians’ visual imagination. Indeed, some photographs were even used to find future husbands and

<sup>38</sup> Froude (ed.), *Carlyle*, Vol.2, p. 110, B&I:S4445-D048.

<sup>39</sup> Haight (ed.), *Eliot*, Vol. 4, p. 337, B&I:S7135-D347.

<sup>40</sup> George Henry Lewes and his wife Agnes Jervis (b. 1822) had agreed to have an open marriage. Karl von Siebold (1804-85) was a German physiologist and zoologist.

<sup>41</sup> Haight (ed.), *Eliot*, Vol. 5, p. 157, B&I:S7136-D158.

<sup>42</sup> *Cartes-de-visite* were also a marketing tool. There were many photographs of the Royal Family, politicians and celebrities available for sale, such as those of the actress Lydia Thompson (1838-1908) and the painter Elizabeth Southerden Thompson (Lady Butler 1846-1933). However, this chapter concentrates on the personal portraits of middle-class women.

<sup>43</sup> ‘Your Future Husband or Wife’s True *Carte De Visite*’, *The Dundee Courier & Argus* (1816-1900) (Dundee, Scotland), 14 October 1867, Issue 4,428, GD:R3209225780.

wives, which might explain why many photographic cards were given along with a note saying that the sitter had already married. However, in these photo collections no photographs were inscribed with a love message, and no letter requested a photograph of a male lover. This does not mean, of course, that Victorians did not use portraits as love tokens, and one might wonder whether the cards with these images were preserved privately and secretly, or whether they were destroyed when the relationship ended, and are therefore not easy to find. One possible example, showing a seated woman with a standing child, is inscribed with ‘My one darling Minnie [...] is in India’ (Figure 3-5). It is unclear who Minnie was (a woman or a child?), whose darling she was, or whether the text was written by Minnie’s lover, husband or female friend.



Fig. 3-5 The Woman with A Little Child, [Anon.], WM:P9322.

It was popular to use studio portraits as a record of a notable transformation in a woman’s life. Nicole Hudgins mentions that, in Manchester and Lille from the 1850s, it became customary for recently-married couples to go to photographic studios to obtain a picture to mark the occasion.<sup>44</sup> Unfortunately, no examples in my research were marked as wedding couples, and it is not easy to identify a wedding photograph, as few brides wore white and wedding sitters were often treated in the same way as others. The first well-known British wedding photograph was that of Princess Victoria and Prince Frederick in 1858, but the earliest found was thought to have been taken on 14

<sup>44</sup> N. Hudgins, ‘A Historical Approach to Family Photography: Class and Individuality in Manchester and Lille, 1850-1914’, *Journal of Social History*, 43:3(2010), 559-586(p. 567).

October 1856.<sup>45</sup> Figure 3-6 shows the maid Hannah Pratley (b. 1832) marrying the farmer George Taylor at a traditional ceremony at St Mary's in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire.<sup>46</sup> It is a mystery how the young couple, who were both 24 years-old, could afford such a luxurious keepsake. 'The local newspapers from the period revealed that Pratley had been accused of murdering her illegitimate son just a few years before her big day', and this could be why the postures of the sitters were somewhat 'frosty'.<sup>47</sup> However, with the long exposure time, the faces and poses of sitters were unnatural in all early photographs, whatever the innocence or possible crimes of the subject.<sup>48</sup>



Fig. 3-6 The Wedding Couple Hannah Pratley and George Taylor, 'Public Member Photos & Scanned Documents', *Ancestry*, <[http://search.ancestry.co.uk/cgi-bin/sse.dll?gl=ROOT\\_CATEGORY&rank=1&new=1&so=3&MSAV=1&msT=1&gss=ms\\_f-2\\_s&gsfn=Hannah+&gsln=Pratley&msbdy=1832&msgdy=1856&cpxt=1&catBucket=rstp&uidh=ia1&cp=11](http://search.ancestry.co.uk/cgi-bin/sse.dll?gl=ROOT_CATEGORY&rank=1&new=1&so=3&MSAV=1&msT=1&gss=ms_f-2_s&gsfn=Hannah+&gsln=Pratley&msbdy=1832&msgdy=1856&cpxt=1&catBucket=rstp&uidh=ia1&cp=11)> [accessed 15 March 2012]

Audrey Linkman notes that engaged couples tended to exchange their individual portraits, though more engaged couples began to take a photograph together in the wake of the engagement photographs of the Prince of Wales (Edward VII) and Princess Alexandra in 1862.<sup>49</sup> One example, showing the standing woman in a striped and spotted dark dress with a brooch and drop earrings, is inscribed with 'Margaret

<sup>45</sup> Lansdell, *Wedding*, p. 1. In a wedding or engagement photograph, the female often wore a ring on her finger, and the male might have flowers in his buttonhole.

<sup>46</sup> 'Public Member Photos & Scanned Documents', *Ancestry.co.uk*, <[http://search.ancestry.co.uk/cgi-bin/sse.dll?gl=ROOT\\_CATEGORY&rank=1&new=1&so=3&MSAV=1&msT=1&gss=ms\\_f-2\\_s&gsfn=Hannah+&gsln=Pratley&msbdy=1832&msgdy=1856&cpxt=1&catBucket=rstp&uidh=ia1&cp=11](http://search.ancestry.co.uk/cgi-bin/sse.dll?gl=ROOT_CATEGORY&rank=1&new=1&so=3&MSAV=1&msT=1&gss=ms_f-2_s&gsfn=Hannah+&gsln=Pratley&msbdy=1832&msgdy=1856&cpxt=1&catBucket=rstp&uidh=ia1&cp=11)> [accessed 15 March 2012]

<sup>47</sup> 'Britain's Oldest Wedding Photo Is Discovered after 156 Years', *Metro*, <<http://www.metro.co.uk/news/890368-britains-oldest-wedding-photo-is-found>> [accessed 15 February 2012]

<sup>48</sup> On the representation of couples in photographs, see pp. 144-145.

<sup>49</sup> Linkman, *Photographic Portraits*, p. 114. There seemed to be no particular dress for engagement, but a ring was an important object, as a signifier of the fiancé's finances and sincerity.



Vorby, born Feb 18<sup>th</sup> 1846, married Feb 19<sup>th</sup> 1863, to my dear aunt from H. H. V' (Figure 3-7).<sup>50</sup> It is certainly possible that this photograph preserves an image of the wedding dress, and it is also the case that many of my photographic cards included a note stating that the sitter was single but about to married. For example, on Figure 3-8 it was stated that 'Annie Mitchell' became 'Mrs Crump', and on Figure 3-9 that Miss Thackeray married Leslie Stephen.<sup>51</sup> One photographic card (Figure 3-10) was marked with a phrase 'Mrs [J ...] and a little body'.<sup>52</sup> These photographs reflect the importance to Victorian women of being a wife and mother.



Fig. 3-7 The Photographs Assuming as the Image of Margaret Vorby's Wedding Dress, [Anon.], WM:62/494.

<sup>50</sup> WM:62/494.

<sup>51</sup> WM:62/1228/27/B; WM:61/830B.

<sup>52</sup> FM:BA95/551C.



Fig. 3-8 The Sitter Annie Mitchell Becoming Mrs Crump, R. Wingfield, Worcester, WM:62/1228/27/B.



Fig. 3-9 The Photograph Inscribing Miss Thackeray Marrying Leslie Stephen (There is a misspelling- 'Stephens' in the card), W. H. Franklin, Deal, WM:61/830B.





Fig. 3-10 The Woman with A Baby, A. Frères, FM:BA95/551C.

Apart from visual pleasure, one of the most important functions of Victorian portraits was to enshrine the memory of a person. After the death of Prince Albert in 1861, Queen Victoria always slept with a photograph of him on one side of her bed.<sup>53</sup> A letter from the English writer and journalist Harriet Martineau (1802-76) to Henry Bright (1830-84), dated 3 May 1863 described how:

a friend of ours, an emancipated Quaker [...] lose his wife last summer [...]. He sends me a photograph of her, & says he has suffered much from his inability to recall her face, with any distinctness. He calls it 'a great trouble to him'. I dare say he thinks it strange & unnatural, after having lived together (devotedly) for above 30 years: but I know by my own experience how natural it is. It used to startle me that I remembered my mother's face less than a hundred others that I had seen only a score of times.<sup>54</sup>

Passing his wife's photograph on to Harriet reveals that the husband was worried that Harriet would forget his dear wife. This shows that people were anxious about forgetting the image of the deceased, and photographs also acted as a memory aid to console the bereaved. Figure 3-11 features the comment that 'you might not have a copy of your respected mother to give your children, so I send it to you in remembrance of

<sup>53</sup> Bello, *Albums*, p. 141. Also see, E. Edwards, 'Photographs as Objects of Memory, in M. Kwint, C. Breward, and J. Aynsley (eds.), *Material Memories* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 221-236. On death, memory and the reconstruction of home, see Hamlett, *Material Relations*, ch. 5, pp. 180-207.

<sup>54</sup> V. Sanders, *Harriet Martineau: Selected Letters* (Oxford, 1990), p. 201, B&I:S7174-D093.



[...] like Margaret's'.<sup>55</sup> The sender used this photograph to link the receivers' reminiscences of the deceased mother and grandmother. As Jalland comments, 'memory was also an important source of consolation for the bereaved'.<sup>56</sup> In fact, there was one specific type of portrait called a post-mortem photograph, which was taken of the deceased and regarded as a keepsake for the bereaved.<sup>57</sup> Figure 3-12 notes two phrases in different handwriting: 'Mrs Tattershall, mother of Alfred and Edward', and 'Great Grandma Tattershall'.<sup>58</sup> This photograph might be assumed to have been passed down to her descendants as a record of kinship. Christian Metz argues that through photography, kinship 'remains alive and strong as a social myth'.<sup>59</sup> Though it is difficult to know the purpose of each individual photograph, the pocket-sized photographs which replaced hand-made portraits clearly did serve as visual memories of kinship, friendship, admiration and special events among mid-Victorian women.



Fig. 3-11 The Memory Photograph, J. L. Debrit, Geneve, WM:62/3398.

<sup>55</sup> WM62/3398.

<sup>56</sup> Jalland, *Death*, p. 310.

<sup>57</sup> Sometimes the deceased was displayed with open eyes as if she were still alive, and children were posed as if they were sleeping. See A. Linkman, *Photography and Death* (2011); idem, 'Taken from Life: Post-Mortem Portraits in Britain 1860-1910', *History of Photography*, 30:4(2006), 309-347; S. B. and E. A. Burns, *Sleeping Beauty II: Grief, Bereavement, and the Family in Memorial Photography, American and European Tradition* (New York, 2002); S. B. Burns, *Sleeping Beauty: Memorial Photography in America* (Pasadena, CA, 1990).

<sup>58</sup> WM:P1077.

<sup>59</sup> Metz, 'Photography and Fetish', p. 82.



Fig. 3-12 The Photograph of Mrs Tattershall as Kinship Memory, Eyre, London, WM:P1077.

### The Representation of Femininity in Photographs

In a cartoon from *Punch* entitled 'Art v. Nature' (1865) (Figure 3-13), the photographer points out that his sitter's 'natural and easy' position 'may do in ordinary life', but 'in photography it's out of the question entirely'.<sup>60</sup> This indicates the differences between representation in photographs and the reality of everyday life, and it also suggests that studio photographs were inevitably affected by the photographer's preferences. Another cartoon from *Punch* in 1870, called 'Astonishing Fact' (Figure 3-14), illustrates the young woman Cecil burning her photographs after her friend's or relative's comment that 'when you have your photograph taken, you should always go to a good place, where the man is an artist. I had mine done the other day, and it is quite beautiful!'<sup>61</sup> This cartoon implies that some mid-Victorians still considered photographs in the same way as fine-art portraits, which had to show a perfect image which flattered the sitter, as opposed to 'an astonishing fact'. This section will now analyse how most studio photographs represented mid-Victorian middle-class womanhood.

<sup>60</sup> 'Art v. Nature', *Punch*, 4 March 1865, p. 88, GD:DX1901570537.

<sup>61</sup> 'Astonishing Fact', *Punch*, 24 December 1870, p. 263, GD:DX1901561400.

Permission to use this image not granted.

Fig. 3-13 'Art v. Nature', *Punch*, 4 March 1865, p. 88, GD:DX1901570537.

Permission to use this image not granted.

Fig. 3-14 'Astonishing Fact', *Punch*, 24 December 1870, p. 263, GD:DX1901561400.

An easy and graceful and yet upright posture was considered an essential part of the mid-Victorian women's beauty, so it is hard to find a sitter with a relaxed posture

in photographs.<sup>62</sup> Photographers requested their sitters to look pleasant rather than to project a natural look, and the majority of female sitters did indeed pose very gracefully to create images of politeness and decorum, rarely gazing directly at the camera but rather looking to one side to present an image of feminine shyness and delicacy.<sup>63</sup> It was also popular for sitters to focus on a distant point, as if they were thinking and had an educated mind. Their hands were often held together in front of the waistline, though they could also be posed on the cheeks, chin or chest, or in a natural position on both sides of the body. These postures show the fact that mid-Victorian middle-class women were comfortable with presenting themselves as self-disciplined and passive. It was problematic, however, for women to show themselves off in photographs that were to be used as visiting cards, as these had to display their social identity, virtues and fine manners. Women's gender identity in photographs was clearly controlled by social and cultural values, and an immodest representation could destroy a woman's reputation.<sup>64</sup>

Victorian men in photographs, on the other hand, were supposed to display their masculine qualities: assurance, assertiveness and decisiveness. They 'crossed legs, elbows out at angles, with canes and umbrella projecting into the space around them', and some were even depicted seated on a table.<sup>65</sup> Compared with women, men often faced the camera, and seemed to have more freedom to choose their own postures. Most men wore a uniform or suit to show their professions and honours, and many male sitters were 'enveloped in gown and mortar board, clutching at scrolls, to confirm that a university degree brought prestige and standing', particular in the late Victorian period.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, a boy 'might be photographed in his new school uniform, as an altar or choir boy, or in his kit as a member of a sport team'.<sup>67</sup> For Victorian men, the most significant events were 'breeching' and 'the acquisition of his first pair of long

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<sup>62</sup> For mid-Victorians, the concept of female beauty referred to morality, virtue and manners rather than solely to physical attractiveness. On morality and beauty, see, Ribeiro, *Facing Beauty*, pp. 226-227.

<sup>63</sup> The postures in early photographs were inevitably affected by paintings. I do not deny that there was also pornography in the mid-Victorian period. See S. Popple, 'Photography, Vice and the Moral Dilemma in Victorian Britain', *Early Popular Visual Culture*, 3:2(2005), 113-133; T. C. Davis, 'The Actress in Victorian Pornography', *Theatre Journal*, 41:3(1989), 294-315. However, in my research, no one was represented as a sexual object, or depicted with sexual connotations.

<sup>64</sup> Mid-Victorian women sitters often posed in a dignified way, especially compared with late Victorian ones. The postures of the latter may have been affected by those of actresses, or perhaps by the fact that later women enjoyed more freedom.

<sup>65</sup> Linkman, *Photographic Portraits*, p. 46.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.



trousers’.<sup>68</sup> The former signified the transformation from the skirt of babyhood to the status of a small boy, and the latter from boyhood to manhood.



Fig. 3-15 The Majority of Sitters in A Reading Sphere, A\_ [Anon.], WM:1985/410/48; B\_ [Anon.], RH:669/1988/3; C\_ G. E. Hansen, Copenhagen, Denmark, PDVA:612-1951; D\_ [Anon.], FM:BA95/445H; E\_ G. & R. Lavis, Eastbourne, WM:P1106; F\_ W. Gillard, Gloucester, FM:BA95/451F.

Props did help the sitters to portray the feminine ideal. Books were considered as the moral agents of Victorian women, capable of modifying their tastes and even character.<sup>69</sup> The majority of the sitters either held or read a book - though there seemed to be no particular book that was recommended for holding in photographs - or they stood with books, bookshelves or a writing desk in the background, suggesting that middle-class women wanted to promote the image that they were well-educated and

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112; A. Jarvis, 'Manual: Dating and Interpreting Victorian Portrait Photographs', 2009, 1-7(p. 4), <<http://www.museumsassociation.org/download?id=55534>> [accessed 10 December 2012]

<sup>69</sup> Corbett, *Representing Femininity*, p. 81.

enjoyed reading and writing (Figure 3-15). Mid-Victorian photographic images projected a cultivated femininity, and in paintings, too, reading was also a popular image for upper or middle-class women. The ideology of Victorian studio photographs was inevitably influenced by paintings, while fashion plates focused on leisure activities rather than reading. Surprisingly, not many floral subjects were employed in photographs, even though they were considered symbols of natural femininity for young Victorian women.<sup>70</sup>



Fig. 3-16 The Sitter Holding A Parrot, H. G. Pilcher, Sittingbourne. WM:54/372/17B.

Fig. 3-17 The Sitter with A Big Hunting Dog, R. H. Preston, Penzance, FM:BA95/445B.

A pet, such as a parrot or a small dog, seemed to be one of the most fashionable female props used to display tenderness and compassion (Figure 3-16). The presence of a big hunting dog, on the other hand, presented a masculine image for the female sitter (Figure 3-17). The photographed animals could also be viewed as reflecting middle-class life experiences: by the mid-Victorian period, many people kept pets.<sup>71</sup> However, in paintings, birds sometimes signified women's 'loose morals and seduction', and also the presence of pets could mean that a wife had to obey her owner (husband).<sup>72</sup> Interestingly, many sitters (13) held a photographic card or album in their photographs, but these images may be interpreted in different ways. For example, the

<sup>70</sup> On the meaning of flowers, see Chapter 1, p. 60.

<sup>71</sup> *Cassell's Household Guide* (1873) (hereafter *Cassell's*), p. 209. *Cassell's Illustrated Family Paper* was first published weekly between 1853 and 1867, and its price rose from 1d. to 6d. in the first five years. From March 1867, it was published monthly, and cost 7d. Brake et al., *Dictionary*, p. 101.

<sup>72</sup> S. P. Casteras, *Images of Victorian Womanhood in English Art* (Rutherford, NJ, 1987), p. 60.



sitter was sometimes depicted as focused on her *carte-de-visite*, so it might be assumed that the sitter was revisiting memories of someone. In this respect, the photograph is not an object but a subject (Figure 3-18). In some examples, too, the sitters turned a page of an album, but without gazing at it, and in other cases the sitters neither gazed at the photograph nor touched it. These images suggest that photographs were used as props to help women to look up-to-date and fashionable. These images were perhaps sometimes created by photographers, in order to show the popularity of being photographed.<sup>73</sup>



Fig. 3-18 The Sitter Looking at A Photograph, W & D. Downey, Newcastle, FM: BA95447B.

Unlike fashion plates, the photographs in my research do not display many consumer products, such as jewellery cases or sewing machines. This could be because the images used in photographs were intended to present a feminine ideal of the sitter, while those in fashion plates attempted to persuade readers to buy the objects. Nevertheless, there is only one example in my research which used sewing to represent the sitter's domestic femininity (Figure 3-19).<sup>74</sup> The reason for the absence of women sewing in photographs could be partly because Victorian women preferred to present their 'literate' accomplishments to their sewing skills, or because in photographs a piano seemed more fashionable than a sewing machine (Figure 3-20), though Branca comments that a sewing machine was more practical and affordable for middle-class

<sup>73</sup> Women in mid-Victorian fashion plates were also depicted looking at photographs, showing the popularity of photographs at the time.

<sup>74</sup> On the role of sewing in the construction of femininity, see Chapter 4.

women than a piano.<sup>75</sup> Of course, the sitters would not bring their own instrument to the studio, but they could choose a studio which contained a piano if they wished to indicate their social status and love of the arts.<sup>76</sup>



Fig. 3-19 The Sitter with her Needlework, J. Ready, St Bees, WM:62/1502.

Fig. 3-20 The Sitters with Pianos, A\_ W. H. Kent, London, WM:62/1288B; B\_ C. M. Drayson, Canterbury, WM:P1105.



<sup>75</sup> Branca, 'Image and Reality', p. 189. On sewing machines destroying femininity, see Chapter 4, p. 194.

<sup>76</sup> On pianos, see Chapter 1, p. 53; Chapter 2, p. 95; Chapter 4, pp. 196-197.



In the 1850s, the background in daguerreotype photographs was often blank, though a few had curtains or a column in the background, and the images always depicted a half or three-quarter length view of the body. In contrast, for *cartes-de-visite*, balustrades, curtains and columns were much employed. They often recorded the full length of the body, though head-and-shoulder portraits were also popular. Linkman comments that 'in England, more than in any other countries, the employment of the full length was extended to encompass the social elite as well as royalty'.<sup>77</sup> In photographs of the 1870s, the most favoured subject was an elaborate chair with a padded back. The quality of backdrops and furniture could be very different from one another, according to the status of the studio. Renowned studios could provide elegant interiors, while provincial ones might only be able to offer a simple setting. Studio interiors could not clearly reflect the domestic life of mid-Victorians, but they did reveal the status of the sitter. By the 1870s, a rustic bridge, stile, fence or garden furniture could be placed in front of a large rural backdrop, an image that might be used to reflect the phenomenon of increased middle-class involvement in outdoor activities.<sup>78</sup> Though Lansdell points out that, owing to the development of ready-made products, studios preferred to buy backdrops rather than make them, no findings in my research suggest that different studios used the same backdrop.<sup>79</sup>

Mid-Victorian fashion plates often used either two young women with a little girl or three young women to show an image of a life experience or social event, such as hosting or attending parties, playing the piano, visiting galleries or walking at the seaside. Mid-Victorian studio photographs were intended to capture an individual image and identity, but they provided many images of female beauty from women of different ages. The fashionable pose for young women was to stand next to a piece of furniture, on which their hands were placed, implying again that women were fragile and needed support (Figure 3-21). Undoubtedly, a significant number of studios were dominated by men, so the representation of femininity was inevitably constructed from a male viewpoint, and most likenesses were based on the ideal of the 'Angel in the House'. Nevertheless, photographs do reveal the 'truth' that not all young women had a small waist, though it is impossible to indicate whether the sitter was expecting a child or not (Figure 3-22). Conversely, painters could easily modify the figure of the sitter.

<sup>77</sup> Linkman, *Photographic Portraits*, p. 51.

<sup>78</sup> Gernsheim, *Photography* (1965), p. 121; on women's participation in sport, see Chapter 6.

<sup>79</sup> Lansdell, *À La Carte*, pp. 12-13.



Fig. 3-21 The Delicate Young Sitters, A\_ R. Harman, Deptford, FM:BA95/446F; B\_ Braden & Allen, Sydney, FM:BA95/444D.

Fig. 3-22 The Sitter with A Large Waist, The London School of Photography. It was inscribed: 'Great Aunt Elizabeth' & 'Isabella Mackie married Mr McCutchen', WM:P1095.



A



B



C

Fig. 3-23 The Majority of Elderly Sitters Seating in A Chair, and Presenting A Natural Beauty, A\_ Monson, Northampton, FM:BA95/442; B\_ T & J. Holroyd, Harrogate, FM:BA95/445C; C\_ C. Silvy, Baywater, FM:BA95/446D.

A large proportion of elderly women were, on the other hand, shown seated in a chair, owing to their physical weakness (Figure 3-23). They often adopted a full-frontal gaze, indicating that they no longer needed to assert their sexual modesty. Images frequently show them wearing a cap to hide their grey hair or bare heads, and indeed one of Mrs Carlyle's letters from 1856 reveals that she had sent Betty a photograph, one with a bonnet and a dog, and told Betty that it would be a shame to be



without a cap or a bonnet at her old age (51).<sup>80</sup> This proves the importance of a cap for elderly Victorian women.<sup>81</sup> The photographs of elderly women in my research seem to present a 'natural beauty', and in images of a respectable 'grandmother'. It is often difficult to know whether the subject was wearing make-up and whether she actually was a grandmother.<sup>82</sup> As *The Arts of Beauty* (1858), by the Irish dancer and actress Lola Montez (Eliza Rosanna Gillbert, 1818-61), claimed, 'a *rouged* old woman is a horrible sight - a distortion of nature's harmony'.<sup>83</sup> Linton declared herself disgusted by the middle-aged woman who was 'dressed in the extreme of youthful fashion', dyed hair, ruddled cheeks, and whitened throat, refusing to grow old.<sup>84</sup> Perhaps they did wear make-up, but it was important that it should appear that they were not.<sup>85</sup> 'Natural' make-up helped women to display a pale complexion, whilst excessive make-up was the mark of fallen women.<sup>86</sup> The French author Louis Aimé-Martin (1786-1847) commented that:

women between the ages of forty-five and sixty whose reproductive powers had ended to welcome the role of grandmother: to become 'a second mother', 'the soul of a new society', and thus save themselves from the 'sorrows of isolation, abandonment, and indifference'.<sup>87</sup>

The Swiss writer Albertine-Adrienne Necker de Saussure (1766-1841) recommended that images of women over sixty had to be supported by morality and religion, and that they had to be shown as calm and selfless, and keen to help their offspring and the poor.<sup>88</sup> That is, a respectable woman had to dress and act according to her age. Older women's photographs often contained a pot of plants on the table rather than flowers

<sup>80</sup> Froude (ed.), *Carlyle*, Vol.2, B&I:S4445-D023.

<sup>81</sup> On head coverings, see Chapter 1, pp. 62-64.

<sup>82</sup> Cited in Perkin, *Victorian Women*, p. 147.

<sup>83</sup> Montez, *The Arts of Beauty*, p. 49. Lola Montez was Eliza's stage name. She offered women advice on how to colour their grey hair. *Ibid.*, pp. 93-94.

<sup>84</sup> Linton, 'La Femme Passée', in idem, *The Girl of the Period*, pp. 309-316 (p. 313).

<sup>85</sup> On another artificial beauty technique, dyeing the hair, see Chapter 1, n. 116, p. 63.

<sup>86</sup> Visible make-up was also dangerous for young women. *An Old-Fashioned Girl* (1870) by Louisa M. Alcott reveals that 'she [Trix, who is Tom's fiancée] never will let me [Tom] kiss her on her cheek, nothing but an unsatisfactory peck at her lips. [...] As I took a bit of heliotrope out of a vase to put in my button-hole, I whisked a drop of water into her face; I was going to wipe it off, but she pushed my hand away, and ran to the glass where she carefully dabbed it dry, and came back with one cheek redder than the other. [...] Half the girls do it, either paint or powder, darken their lashes with burnt hair- pins, and take cologne on lumps of sugar or belladonna to make their eyes bright'. Chapter X Brothers and Sisters in *An Old-Fashioned Girl*, <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2787/2787-h/2787-h.htm#2HCH0001>> [accessed 28 May 2012] To deal with technological problems, photographers would use powder on sitters' hair. See below, p. 150.

<sup>87</sup> Cited in E. O. Hellerstein, L. P. Hume, and K. M. Offen (eds.), *Victorian Women: A Documentary Account of Women's Lives in Nineteenth-Century England, France, and the United States* (Stanford, CA, 1981), p. 457. L. Aimé-Martin, *The Education of Mothers of Families, or The Civilisation of the Human Race by Women* (1842), trans. by E. Lee.

<sup>88</sup> Hellerstein et al., *Victorian Women*, pp. 475, 479, 481.

(Figure 3-24), in contrast to those of young women. This phenomenon seems to confirm Montez's argument that women beyond the age of fifty were considered as having passed 'the age of life when roses are natural to the cheek'.<sup>89</sup>



Fig. 3-24 The Props according to the Age of Sitters, A\_ John Cann, Tiverton, FM:BA95/450F; B\_ W. Saxby, Faversham, FM:BA95/443Y.

In addition, Victorian photographs portrayed a number of different kinds of group images of women, ranging from sisterhood, mother-daughter, friendship and photographs with both women and men. In the absence of a recorded document, it is not easy to identify the relationship between the women in these photographs. However, when women wore identical dresses, they were always family members, such as a mother and a daughter, or sisters (Figure 3-25).<sup>90</sup> In this case, dress represented family identity rather than selfhood. Sharon Marcus comments that Victorian mothers not only shared the latest fashions with their daughters, but they also liked to drape their daughters in clothes in order to help them attract a man to marry.<sup>91</sup> Within the strict Victorian ethic, the oldest sitter in a group was often the seated one. Though sitters were close enough to touch one another's hands or shoulders, they were frequently shown looking in different directions (Figure 3-26). This is different from Victorian paintings, in which the sitters often looked in the same direction, and usually directly at the

<sup>89</sup> Montez, *The Arts of Beauty*, p. 49.

<sup>90</sup> In *The Ball on Shipboard* (1874) by James Tissot, many sitters also wore an identical dress.

<sup>91</sup> Marcus, *Women*, p. 117.

viewer.<sup>92</sup> Technological reasons were also important, as ‘the more of the sitter included the more work was involved, so the greater the cost’.<sup>93</sup> For this reason, mid-Victorian photographs are mainly portraits of just one person.



Fig. 3-25 The Sitters Wearing the Identical Dress, A\_ [Anon.], RH: without access no; B\_ [Anon.], FM:BA95/449Z.

Fig. 3-26 The Group Portrait, J. Raine, Yorkshire, FM:BA95/5519.

<sup>92</sup> Idem, ‘Plates’, p. 20.

<sup>93</sup> Linkman, *Photographic Portraits*, p. 51.

Photographs also provide representations of the relationship between Victorian women and men, at least as compared to plates in women's magazines, which rarely featured a male figure: even if there was a man, he was always a trifling character in the background. Middle-class women were trained not only how to stand, sit and walk properly, and how to behave on each occasion, but also how to take the arm of the man escorting them. This meant that most Victorians learnt to hide their true feelings from the public, so sitters' stances and postures, as well as their eye contact, may not always reveal how close the relationship between the couple was. It seems that there was no particular norm that the wife should be seated in a chair, or in a lower relative position than her husband. Linkman claims that the photographer's concern 'was to get the two heads into a rather limited field of focus. A tall gentleman would normally be asked to take a sitting position in order to bring his head into focus with that of his lady'.<sup>94</sup> However, according to my research photographs, it was uncommon for both sitters to sit down. There were three main positions for portraits of mid-Victorian couples. In the first of these, the standing couple was either depicted arm in arm or standing close enough to touch each other (Figure 3-27), and, in the second, the standing wife would rest her hands on one side of the seated husband's shoulders or chair (Figure 3-28). In the third pose, the standing husband would look at his seated wife, who either turned away from her husband's gaze or looked in his direction but not directly into his eyes (Figure 3-29). Most couples rarely hold eye contact or engage in physical touch, and mid-Victorian photographic images of middle-class couples certainly did not convey a sense of intimacy or physical indulgence.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 114 & 118. In many royal photographs, Queen Victoria was the standing figure, while Prince Albert was seated. This could have been because the Prince was much taller than the Queen.

<sup>95</sup> Linkman also makes the point that 'well-bred people did not indulge in any public expression of emotion, and a serious expression suggested you took yourself seriously and encouraged others to do likewise. A calm expression also implied self-control'. *Ibid.*, p. 43.





Fig. 3-27 The Standing Couple 'Mr and Mrs Leslie' Arm in Arm, [Anon.], FM:BA95/444J.

Fig. 3-28 The Wife Resting her Hand on her Husband's Shoulder, A. H. Board, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, FM:BA95/551.

Fig. 3-29 The Standing Husband Looking at his Wife, L. Angerer, Vienna, Austria, PDVA:705/1956.





Fig. 3-30 Queen Victoria Holding Princess Beatrice, Mayall, London, PDVA:783/1956.



Fig. 3-31 The Mother Holding A Boy, [Anon.], RH:78/1966/13.

Photographs reveal little interaction between mother and children, despite the fact that parenthood was the most important career for a Victorian woman. This might reflect Martha Vicinus's comment that most middle-class children were brought up by wet nurses, nannies or governesses rather than by their mother.<sup>96</sup> Branca, though, argues that most middle-class mothers had to rear their children by themselves, owing to a limited budget.<sup>97</sup> It is difficult to define, though, whether the sitter was the mother, the grandmother or the nurse of the child.<sup>98</sup> Victorians sometimes had their first child in their late teens, and their last in their mid-forties.<sup>99</sup> Few photographs show such deep mother-love as the image of Queen Victoria holding Princess Beatrice (1857-1944) on her knee and encircling her with her arms, taken in 1863 (Figure 3-30). Undoubtedly, photographs were a kind of advertisement used to promote the Royal Family.<sup>100</sup> In most of my research photographs, boys or girls often stood next to their seated mother. Boys were frequently held or received more bodily touches from the mother (Figure

<sup>96</sup> M. Vicinus, 'Introduction: The Perfect Victorian Lady', in idem (ed.), *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* (1972), pp. vii-xv (pp. ix-x).

<sup>97</sup> Branca, 'Image and Reality', p. 188.

<sup>98</sup> Later in the century, the nurse would probably have been wearing a uniform. See C. Bates, "'Their Uniforms All Esthetic and Antiseptic': Fashioning Modern Nursing Identity, 1870-1900", in I. Parkins and E. M. Sheehan (eds.), *Cultures of Femininity in Modern Fashion* (2011), pp. 151-179. On the uniform of female servants and nurses, see Richmond, *Finery*, pp. 61-65.

<sup>99</sup> On Victorian women and the menopause, see Chapter 1, n. 122, p. 64.

<sup>100</sup> In 1867, Downey's studio sold 300,000 copies of the portrait 'Alexandra, Princess of Wales carrying baby Louise on her back'. Ginsburg, *Photographs*, p. 15.

3-31), whereas the mother merely placed a hand on the back of the girls.<sup>101</sup> Many photo collections show, though, that the girls often actively held their mothers' hands or shoulders.<sup>102</sup> It is possible that mothers were more critical of daughters in order to make sure that they acted in an appropriate manner.



Fig. 3-32 The Sitter Holding A Baby Wearing A Long Dress, Caxton House, Nottingham, PDVA:P667/1956.

The baby was always held in the lap of the mother (Figure 3-32), and the majority of mothers turned their gaze towards the baby.<sup>103</sup> This could be because the baby needed more care and attention than an older child, or perhaps the sitters had just become mothers, and so it was hard for them to hide their joy and love. Perhaps, a good mother was expected to look at their baby to show their affection. Above all, this image is probably staged to echo paintings of the Madonna and Child. Kate Retford argues that in eighteenth-century paintings ‘the newly fashionable status of breastfeeding rendered it a crucial signifier of motherly virtue, revealing a woman’s affection and care for her children’.<sup>104</sup> However, no photographs in my research depict breastfeeding. *Etiquette for Ladies* (1857) commented that ‘the open or uncovered bosom has been the sign and

<sup>101</sup> As Joan Perkin argues, ‘middle-class parents wanted sons to carry on the family name and businesses’. Perkin, *Victorian Women*, p. 7.

<sup>102</sup> Middle-class boys and girls wore skirts before the age of five. Buck, *Victorian Costumes*, p. 202; Hellerstein et al., *Victorian Women*, p. 10.

<sup>103</sup> Babies would generally wear a long dress, and until they were six months old this dress would be shortened. Ginsburg, *Photographs*, p. 104.

<sup>104</sup> K. Retford, *The Art of Domestic Life: Family Portraiture in Eighteenth-Century England* (2006), ch. 3, pp. 83-114(p. 88).

privilege of innocent youth, and of maidenhood in particular'.<sup>105</sup> Photographic images did not, of course, tend to record daily life (as in breastfeeding), but something remarkable (such as a christening). Mid-Victorian photographs might not reveal the actual attitudes or the personal identity of sitters, but they did reflect the ideals of female beauty and women's identity at different stages of life.

### Fashion in Photographs

On 31 October 1864, Mrs Carlyle wrote a letter to her close friend Mrs Mary Russell (d. 1875), explaining why she disliked the photograph of her servant Mary. She mentioned the fact that:

the crinoline quite changes her character and makes her a stranger for me. I want the one that is, as I have always seen her, a sensible girl with no crinoline. I would like her, if she would get herself done for me, as she is on washing mornings - in the little pink bed-gown and blue petticoat. I send a shilling in stamps for the purpose, but don't force her inclinations in the matter.<sup>106</sup>

This testifies to the fact that sitters liked to dress up to be photographed, because photography was still a special event in daily life. A study by Sarah Edge mentions that, according to a diary entry on 28 February 1863 by Arthur Munby (1828-1910), servant girls "always come to 'dress up'; often stealing their mistress's dress to be photographed in". Edge goes on to argue that dress in this context is more than just an unstable sign of class.<sup>107</sup> However, in my view this indicates that working-class women were emulating the fashions of the middle-class, as dress was an important prop for the construction of gender and self-identity, though we only know this in this instance because the context in which these photographs were taken is known. As Barthes commented, the meaning of real clothing differs from that of clothing as shown in fashion photographs or in magazines.<sup>108</sup> Buck argued that the exchange of photographs is, in itself, a 'fashion', and unintentionally an exchange of information about dress.<sup>109</sup> This section will explore what photographers advised sitters to wear, how middle-class women negotiated advice from photographers and women's fashion magazines to dress

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<sup>105</sup> *Etiquette for Ladies*, p. 13.

<sup>106</sup> Froude (ed.), *Carlyle, Vol.2*, p. 311, B&I:S4445-D146. Mrs Mary Russell was the wife of Dr James Russell.

<sup>107</sup> S. Edge, 'Urbanisation: Discourse Class Gender in Mid-Victorian Photographs of Maids- Reading the Archive of Arthur J. Munby', *Critical Discourse Studies*, 5:4(2008), 303-317(p. 312). Edge also argues that in photographs 'hand as a visual sign of class is highly significant'. Servants often had bigger hands, and tended to hide their rough or clumsy hands. *Ibid.*, p. 310.

<sup>108</sup> Barthes, *Fashion System*, pp. 3-7.

<sup>109</sup> Buck, 'Clothing in Fiction', p. 98.

up for photographs, and the differences between fashion in photographs, magazines and reality.

To produce a pretty portrait, photographers would suggest that a woman who had a nose that was slightly too large should avoid having her photograph taken from the front, and one whose ears were small would not be recommended to have her photograph taken in profile.<sup>110</sup> While brunettes looked pretty in dark dresses, blondes were advised to wear much lighter colours. Because the golden colour of hair loses its brilliance in photographs, brunettes tended to make better photographic images than blondes. To solve this problem, photographers would put some powder on the hair of blondes, as the photographs would turn this into a natural tint.<sup>111</sup> On 21 June 1863, a letter from George Eliot to her close friend Sara Sophia Hennell (1812-99) encouraged her to feel proud of the tiny photograph that she had sent to Eliot, stating that:

it was a very good one for some points of your face and expression to any one who knows you, but strangers, who saw nothing but your photographs would image you quite a different person. But for Cara, her face was altered and looked very large.<sup>112</sup>

This letter points out that photographs might not be able to record the 'truth', as photographers attempted to produce an ideal image. The characteristics of the sitter could be changed dramatically, and this might disappoint both sitter and viewer.

Victorian photography was not sensitive to all colours, so the colours of dresses had a major influence on the quality of photographs. The colours that were most luminous to the eye did not always produce the most energetic effects in Victorian photographs. In photographic terms, blue is white, and orange is black. The order of photographic colours, from the lightest to the darkest, are white, light blue, violet, pink, mauve, dark blue, lemon, blue green, leather-brown, purple, red, amber, orange and black. Other shades of colour are proportionally lighter or darker if they combine more or less of the colours. The sitters were therefore suggested to dress in green, orange or red, and they were advised to avoid wearing white, light blue or pale pink, despite the fact that some of these shades were fashionable at the time, as they would make the photographs appear to lack detail.<sup>113</sup> The most suitable fabrics for women to wear were dark silk, shot silks, satins and brocade dresses, and the worst black velvet dresses.

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<sup>110</sup> 'Sitting for One's Photograph', *The Graphic* (1869-1932), 18 March 1871, Issue 68, GD:BA3201414833.

<sup>111</sup> 'How to Dress for a Photograph', *Glasgow Herald*, 6 January 1862, Issue 7,800, GD:BC3203547418.

<sup>112</sup> Haight (ed.), *Eliot, Vol.4*, p. 90, B&I:S7135-D099. Sara was born in a strict Unitarian family.

<sup>113</sup> M. Disderi, 'Some Hints about Portraits in Photography', *EDM*, 1 February 1864, Issue 47, p. 227, GD:DX1901417892.

While sitters could wear checked, striped or figured dresses, they had to avoid wearing light colours.<sup>114</sup> Close-fitting light dresses increased the dimensions of the head, hands and limbs, while flowing and ample dresses made these parts appear small and delicate.<sup>115</sup>

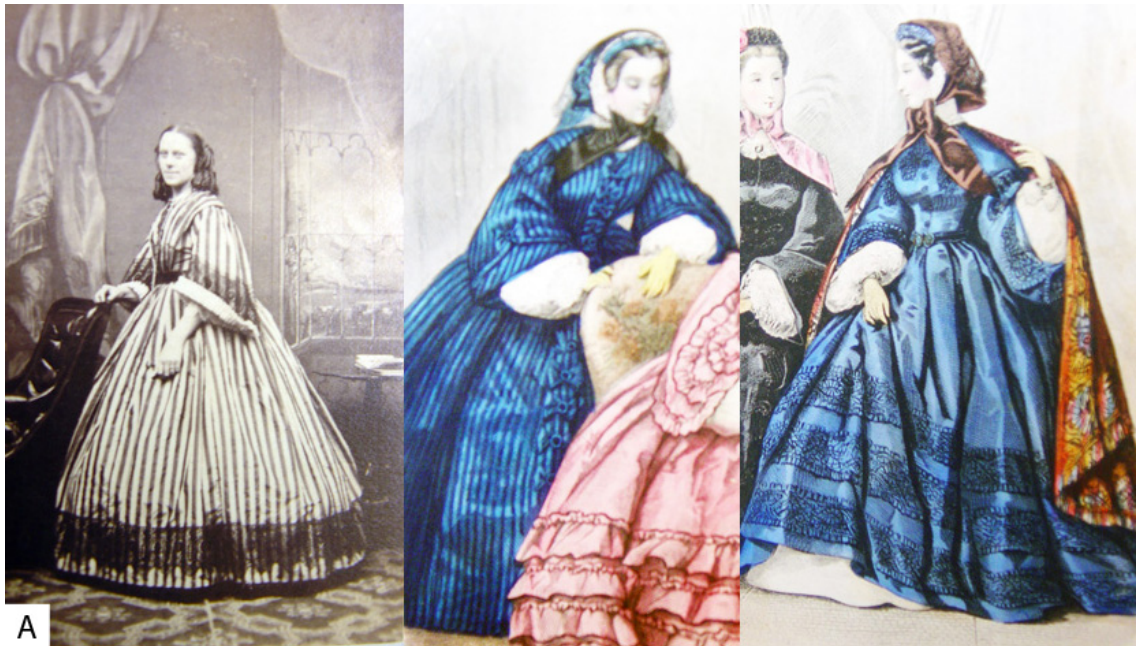
These photo collections indicate that most mid-Victorian women did take photographers' advice when being photographed. The most common style of dress was dark, plain textile with trimmings, and the most notable and popular fabric was moiré, though it is difficult to identify the weave of dresses, such as whether they bore printed or waved motifs, or were made of shot silk or satin. A minority of sitters dressed in figured, striped, horizontal-striped, checked, velvet or light-coloured dresses. Similarly, few sitters wore evening dresses, which were often made in either light colours or light fabrics. It is impossible to know why the sitter chose a specific dress to wear, whether it was just because such a dress could help her to achieve a clear image, or what kind of information she wished to convey to viewers. Though most photographed dresses were not trimmed as luxuriously as those shown in the fashion plates, they were decorated with similar ornamentation to that mentioned in women's magazines (Figure 3-33). Historical photographs not only reveal that middle-class women took an active part in fashion, but they also draw on reflections of fashion from different ages of female sitter. The photographed dress mirrored the sitter's social status, though it might not indicate where they actually lived.

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<sup>114</sup> Lambert, *Fashion in Photographs*, p. 12. 'For gentlemen: black, figured check or plaid or other fancy vests are preferable to white. For children: plaid, striped red or figured dresses'. Cited in Ginsburg, *Photographs*, p. 17. To present an image of a glamorous woman in black-and-white films in the 1930s, an actress was required to wear 'glitter (especially the sparkle of diamonds), thick, lustrous furs, slinky dress', and red lips. C. Dyhouse, *Glamour: Women, History, Feminism* (2010), pp. 29-38. Even with the high technology available nowadays, it is still important to wear the right dress for a video shoot. The worst colours are white, black and red. Stripes, checks, complicated patterns and shiny materials which could create a shimmering or flickering effect, and jackets or clothes with a lot of zips, which create noise, should be avoided.

<sup>115</sup> Disderi, GD:DX1901417892.





A

Fig. 3-33 The Similar Fashionable Designs on Both Photographs and Plates,  
A\_ R. Slingsby, Lincoln, RH:676/1988/3, *NMBA*, January 1860 & November 1861;



B

B\_ [Anon.], PDVA:503I, *NMBA*, August 1860;





C

C \_ Hughes, London, PDVA:1955/9/3/95; Mayer Brothers, London, VAO:S133/7/2007, *NMB4*, June 1861;



D

D \_ Hermann Günter, Berlin, PDVA:E1468/2000, *EDM*, December 1862;





E\_ Southwell Brothers, London, RH:176/1986, *EDM*, March 1866.



Fig. 3-34 The Similar Fashionable Design on Both Photograph and Plate, The London School of Photography, WM:62/1220; *EDM*, 1 October 1865, GD:DX1901419927.

Young or unmarried women were required to dress in a genteel fashion, and young sitters often wore a simple style of fashionable dress (Figure 3-34). Wearing too many ornaments or jewellery was probably seen as excessively materialistic, as was mentioned already in Chapter One. The appearance of highly religious groups was required to be simple, and the wearing of jewellery was criticised, particularly for



Quakers.<sup>116</sup> Modest dress was intended to help a woman to attract a husband suitable for the position of her family. Apart from plain fabrics, the most fashionable dress patterns for young sitters were stripes and horizontal stripes. Most photographed dresses of a light colour were also worn by young sitters (Figures 3-15-C & 3-21), which could be because light colours such as white, pink and light blue were suitable for young women, though they were also fashionable colours at the time. Five out of eight portraits of Miss Homewood, Miss C. L. Homewood, Miss E. Homewood and Miss M. E. Homewood, for example, display the fashionable style of light dresses, simply trimmed with ribbon (Figure 3-35).<sup>117</sup> It is uncertain what kind of relationship existed between these Miss Homewoods, but they must have been at very least middle-class women, since most of their photographs were taken by the famous photographer John Mayall (1813-1901). This implies that the Miss Homewoods could have had more financial support to follow the latest fashions than other women. They also attended a high-quality studio, so they did not perhaps need to worry that they might receive an unclear image if they wore light dresses to be photographed. Moreover, photographs reveal that young sitters readily adopted the latest fashion style for sleeves, such as puffed sleeves and Gabrielle sleeves (Figure 3-36). This was because the style itself was more suitable for the younger woman, and it was easier and more comfortable for elder women to wear open sleeves like pagoda or bell-shaped sleeves.

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<sup>116</sup> On Quakers' dress, see Chapter 1, pp. 47-49.

<sup>117</sup> Most of the Homewoods' photographs had a replica.



Fig. 3-35 The Homewood Women, A\_ Mayall, London, WM:54/372/64B; B\_ Mayall, London, WM:54/372/30C; C\_ Mayall, London, WM:54/372/19B; D\_ R. Boning, St Leonards, WM:54/372/32C.



Fig. 3-36 The Young Sitters Wearing Puffed Sleeves, A\_ McLean, Haymarket, WM:64/629;  
B\_ T. Coleman, London, WM:68/99.

Of all the different ages of sitter, middle-aged women presented the most luxurious photographic images.<sup>118</sup> Most of the moiré dresses were worn by them, and they seem to have preferred floral motifs rather than striped or checked patterns. Meanwhile, they often wore accessories like earrings, necklaces or other jewels. Figure 3-37, for example, shows the sitter dressed in a multiple-net flounced skirt, draped in a shawl, and wearing a watch chain, bracelet, rings and earrings. Figure 3-38, on the other hand, depicts the sitter wearing a string of beads and earrings, and her simple style of evening dress is made of moiré and decorated with lace. The sitter does not just place her hand on the chair, but actively ‘plays’ it, suggesting that middle-aged women might feel more free to express themselves in photographs, as compared to younger women. Figure 3-39 portrays Eleanor Percy, the Duchess of Northumberland (1820-1911), wearing an exaggerated crinoline dress decorated with plenty of netting. The dress indicates her marital and social status. In addition, the crinoline worn by middle-aged women was slightly bigger than that worn by other groups of women, whereas the size of crinolines in photographs was not as exaggerated as in fashion plates, indicating that middle-class women did not dress in an exaggerated way, but rather modestly, to represent their stable identity.

<sup>118</sup> See A. Vickery, ‘Mutton Dressed as Lamb: Fashioning Age in Georgian England’, *Journal of British Studies*, 52:4(2013), 858-886.





Fig. 3-37 The Middle-Aged Sitter Wearing A Multiple-Net Flounced Skirt, Lock & Whitfield, London, FM:BA95/444U.

Fig. 3-38 The Middle-Aged Sitter Wearing A Moiré Dress, London, FM:BA95/444G.

Fig. 3-39 The Duchess of Northumberland Wearing An Exaggerated Crinoline Dress Trimmed with Plenty of Nets, L. Caldesi, London, PDVA:936-1956.

The dresses of elderly sitters often displayed an obsolete style. There were thirteen examples made in the style of the 1840s, even though these images were thought to have been taken in the late 1850s. For instance, in Figure 3-40, the older sitter wears a dress cut in a pointed waist in front and trimmed with open sleeves, and

annotated with 'For dear Ellen - with best love, March 1864'.<sup>119</sup> The most fashionable dress in the early 1860s, though, involved either a jacket bodice or a false waistcoat with a bolero jacket, rather than a pointed waist, and it was unusual for sleeves to be worn with undersleeves. Figure 3-41 shows the sitter dressed in mid-1860s style, but the reverse side of the card is inscribed with, 'H. Hobson to dear Elly, 1877. There troth thee with an everlasting love. He is of our mind, who can twin him'.<sup>120</sup> It is reasonable to wonder whether the date was in fact the date when the sitter was photographed, or the date when she sent the card to her friend. In her photographic survey, Alison Gernsheim also pointed out that 'people sometimes gave favourite old portraits to friends'.<sup>121</sup> Nevertheless, a few photographs show that elderly sitters wore a bustle style of dress, which might suggest that older women preferred to wear a style of dress which was fashionable in their early years. It is possible that they would have been more critical of the latest fashion, since women's magazines mainly focused on young women. However, it should not be concluded that all elderly women wore dark grey or black old-fashioned dresses: it is more likely that this depended on the sitter's financial support as well as on how fashionable they were, a topic which will be explored in more detail in Chapter Five.



Fig. 3-40 The Older Sitter Wearing An Obsolete Style of Dress, Turner & Everitt, Islington, WM:62/496.

<sup>119</sup> WM:62/496.

<sup>120</sup> E. Drewett, Guildford, FM:BA95/449G. On the financial situation of widows, see Chapter 1, n. 105, p. 61.

<sup>121</sup> Gernsheim, *Victorian and Edwardian Fashion*, p. 21.



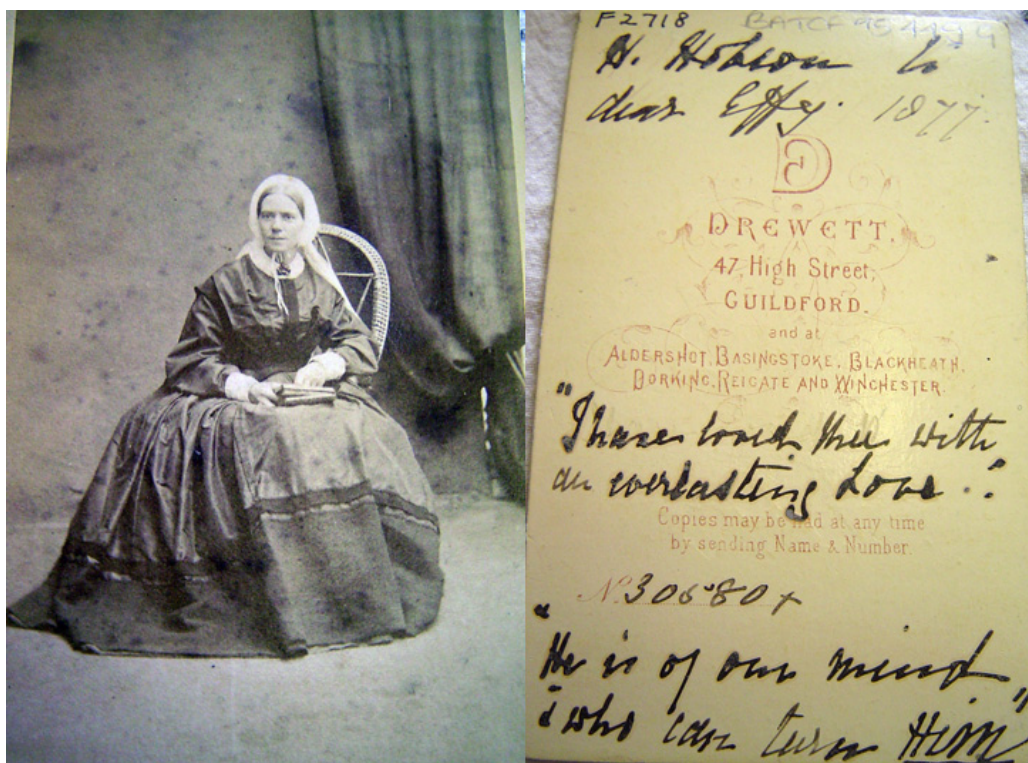


Fig. 3-41 The Older Sitter Dressed in the Mid-1860s Style, E. Drewett, Guildford, FM:BA95/449G.



Fig. 3-42 The Sitters Wearing A Fashionable Short Jacket, Abraham Thomas, Gloucester, FM:BA95/550T.



Fig. 3-43 The Sitter Wearing A Shawl, Bonnet and Gloves, and Holding A Parasol, D. H. Speakman, Leamington, FM:BA95/443J.

Apart from day dress and evening dress, studio photographs also reveal fashions in outdoor garments.<sup>122</sup> Compared to young and middle-aged women, older women were much less commonly depicted dressed in outdoor outfits. More women chose a large lace shawl than a 'Cashmere' shawl, though the latter was described as a very popular accessory in women's magazines.<sup>123</sup> Some were dressed in a fashionable short jacket (Figure 3-42). Sitters often wore or held a bonnet or hat in their hands, sometimes accompanied by a parasol. Though contemporary etiquette books argued that middle-class women should wear a pair of gloves all the time to keep their hands fine and white, not many sitters actually wore gloves (Figure 3-43). It is worth wondering to what extent Victorians applied such etiquette: even Queen Victoria often displayed ungloved hands in her photographs. Furthermore, few sitters wore a winter dress, which might suggest that people liked to be photographed in the summertime, since lighting might not be strong enough in the winter to produce a clear image. It is probable too that sitters were intended to take off their long heavy coats, as they were seen as serviceable but not so fashionable, and they might cover the sitter's figure or her fashionable silhouette (Figures 3-17 & 44), or else they were made of black velvet, which would blur the photographic image. Sitters rarely held a muff, either (Figure 3-43), perhaps because a fur muff might be a luxury product for a middle-class woman.<sup>124</sup> Lastly, it is difficult to define the actual colour of a dress in photographs, but four of the sitters wore a dark shirt, which may have been the red Garibaldi shirt, which had been a fashionable item since 1861 (Figure 3-45).

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<sup>122</sup> On femininity in sportswear, see Chapter 6.

<sup>123</sup> On shawls, see Chapter 5, pp. 227-228.

<sup>124</sup> On muffs recorded in inventories, see Chapter 5, p. 231.





Fig. 3-44 The Sitter Holding A Muff, W & D. Downey, Newcastle, PDVA:881-1956.

Fig. 3-45 The Photographs and Plates of Garibaldi Shirts, A\_ H. G. Pilgher, WM:54/372/10B, the sitter is Miss C. L. Homewood; B\_ EDM, 1 December 1861, GD:DX1901422536; C\_ Stewart, Kirkcudbright, WM:1985/410/65.





Fig. 3-46 The Dresses Decorated with Rosettes, A\_ [Anon.], RH:466/1984/4; B\_ [Anon.], RH:477/1989/5; C\_ J. Perkins, Bath, WM:P9319; D\_ The London School of Photography, WM:62/1281.

The dresses of sitters in photographs taken in provincial studios are not always less fashionable than those taken in the cities. For example, in Figure 3-46, four sitters from different areas wore a dress decorated with rosettes, which was the fashionable mode of trimming between 1859 and 1861. This proves that fashion was widely distributed through the printed media, and that people mostly shared similar fashions. In



my research, only one surviving dress from RH is decorated with two rosettes on the bodice, suggesting that historical photographs provide more images of Victorian dresses which might not be found in surviving dress collections, as a dress could be constantly altered to reflect different styles, and decorations could be easily removed over time in accordance with new fashions.<sup>125</sup> In another example (Figure 3-47), four sitters are clothed in a moiré bustle dress. Moiré was recommended as a fashionable fabric in women's magazines of the 1860s, but not for making a bustle style of dress. This seems to suggest that provincial sitters adopted the latest fashions slightly later than urbanites, while it also raises the question of whether these dresses were altered from 1860s dresses, or whether they were the result of personal taste or a limited clothing budget. Once a fabric was out of fashion, its price suddenly became much cheaper, and there could also be a time lag between buying a piece of cloth and making a dress.<sup>126</sup> The most extreme instances (64) from Belfast studios are concerned with presenting 'cleanliness' and 'neatness' rather than fashion, suggesting a possible difference between England and Northern Ireland (Figure 3-48). Perhaps, too, these sitters might have been of working-class origins.

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<sup>125</sup> RH:116-1934-1.

<sup>126</sup> On Jewsbury buying a cheaper and obsolete fabric, see Introduction, p. 16; on buying objects when discounted, see Chapter 5, pp. 211-212.



Fig. 3-47 The Moiré Bustled Dresses, A\_ Hills & Saunders, Oxford, WM62/358; B\_ L & Y, Burnley, WM:P4512; C\_ W.M. Hall (Cabinet card), Brighton, WM:1985/409/6; D\_ H. Mover, Exeter, WM:1985/428.





Fig. 3-48 The Majority of Sitters in Belfast Presenting 'Cleanliness' and 'Neatness' rather than Fashion,  
 A\_ J. Magill, Belfast, PDVA:1700:34-1956; B\_ E. & J. Millan, Belfast, PDVA:1700:98-1956; C\_ Mr  
 Millan, Belfast, PDVA:1700:100-1956; D\_ John Gibson, Belfast, PDVA:1700:81-1956.





Fig. 3-49 The Same Dress Worn by Different Sitters, A\_ J. Magill, Belfast, PDVA:1700:15-1938;  
B\_ J. Magill, Belfast, PDVA:1700:90-1938.



Fig. 3-50 The Same Dress Worn by Different Sitters, A\_ J. Gibson, Belfast, PDVA:1700:7-1956;  
B\_ J. Gibson, Belfast, PDVA:1700:78-1956.

In addition, secondary sources often claim that, as the market for photography was very competitive, studios were not only constantly improving their equipment but also providing more and more props and dresses for their clients. They also suggest that most of the sitters wore dresses that were provided by the studio rather than their own



dress. However, in my researched examples, only two cases from Belfast showed the same dress worn by different sitters (Figures 3-49 & 50), suggesting that the dress was an important object which allowed the majority of sitters to construct their self-identity in photographs, and that they thus preferred to wear their own dresses. It is possible that the sitters were in fact family members, because it was not uncommon for Victorian sisters to share a dress or to wear an identical dress. There was also an example of two photographs taken by different studios, which reordered the same sitter wearing the same dress and headdress (Figure 3-51). This dress might be taken to be her best dress, which had also been worn for a while, given that it was almost impossible for a Victorian to have photographs taken in two different studios in one day, even if they were near each other.



Fig. 3-51 The Sitter Wearing the Same Dress in Different Studios, A\_ *Carte-de-Visite*, Silas Eastham, Southport, WM:P4135. B\_ Cabinet card, Albert Sachs, Bradford, WM:P4269.

By circulating photographs, middle-class women simultaneously exchanged their taste in dress, given that there was a custom of critiquing photographic images. The image created by studio self-portraits, which aimed to promote the sitter and to show off her self-fashioning, was different from that of fashion photographs or magazines, which aimed to sell ‘fashion’ itself. This explains Barthes’ comment that the clothing presented in fashion photographs lacks the functions of protection, modesty and adornment. Most middle-class women did not passively follow the fashion in women’s magazines, and they rejected photographic images they viewed negatively,

even if the sitter was dressed at the height of fashion. These representative images express the social, gender and self-identity of the sitter, and when a photograph projected a positive image, women would want to emulate the appearance and manners of the sitter, which would in itself create a fashion for being photographed. In such a case, studio photographs functioned as silent flyers, actively transmitting fashion. This could have been one of the reasons why most sitters wore a plain dark dress in photographs. Studio photographs reveal that most middle-class women sitters seem to have paid attention to the photographer's advice, and that they balanced the fashion of women's magazines with social and cultural values, dressing to present their own identity.

### **Conclusion**

These historic photo collections reveal important social and cultural patterns for the mid-Victorians. For middle-class women, photographs were a modern form of expression and social practice. Most women circulated their personal photographs, but some, like George Eliot, may have only collected those of others, and avoided being photographed themselves. This could be because the technology of photography was still in its early stages, and some were worried about receiving an unattractive photograph. Photographs were also a tool for Victorian women to find a future husband, as well as to record special events in their lifetime, such as being a wife or a mother. Most importantly of all, photographs were a vehicle of memory and a token of kinship. For this reason, sitters were keen to create a positive image and to show both their individuality and their social conformity, with a view to their family, friends and offspring considering and remembering them as such. It is only by looking at the photographs as objects with a social role that we can successfully interpret the meaning of the clothing displayed within them.

Posture was regarded as a fundamental part of mid-Victorian women's beauty, and so sitters were asked to follow the photographer's direction to produce an elegant and respectable social identification. Compared with men, women often looked askance at the camera, presenting an image of feminine shyness and delicacy. Books were the most popular female props, as they projected an image of well-educated middle-class women. The majority of sitters used their own dresses to project their identity, and most photographed dresses were decorated with similar ornamentation to that mentioned in women's magazines, though this was generally not as luxurious in character. This suggests that middle-class women actively participated in fashion, and dressed

fashionably and modestly. This was partly because most mid-Victorians dressed up to be photographed, and the dresses depicted might not be their everyday dresses: in one photograph, for example, Mrs Carlyle's servant Mary is wearing a crinoline, which she certainly did not wear in her daily life. Furthermore, because of the need to produce a clear image, the fashion in photographs was mainly for plain, dark dresses, whereas in reality women's clothing was much more colourful, and had more design patterns. We can thus see that historical photography was itself able to construct an image of fashion.

Compared with fashion plates, which only present blossoming youth, photographs encapsulated the ideals of female beauty and identity at different stages of life. Age was a key determinant of dress, but it is striking that middle-aged women were often the most splendid in photographs. Not only are they better dressed than the younger women, but they also address the viewer with far more confidence: they look directly at the camera, something which young women never did, as they had to maintain their reputation for modesty. This finding challenges the previous research on the attractions of youth, and brings with it a new understanding of middle-aged women's authority in terms of dress and deportment. Older women, on the other hand, often wore an obsolete style of dress, which could be attributable to a lack of awareness of fashion, financial difficulties or widowhood. Most wore a cap and had no make-up, in order to present a stable identity and to show the natural beauty of the grandmother. A respectable woman had to dress according to her age.

Sitters from different areas could dress similarly, so dress might not always indicate where they lived, or enable us to conclude that provincial sitters were less fashionable than urban ones. This could also reflect the distribution of printed media. The only exception in these case studies were from studios in Belfast, where the images appear more concerned with presenting 'cleanliness' and 'neatness' rather than fashion, and this might suggest a distinction between England and Northern Ireland although this example was also from a relatively low echelon of the middle class. Analysing historical photographs can show us Victorian ideals of female beauty, representation and fashion. Moving away from specifically visual representation, the next two chapters will now move on to how middle-class women used home sewing and dress consumption as expressions of femininity and class.

## Chapter 4

### Women Sewing at Home: Ideology, Fashion and Expression

On 28 January 1860, after finishing sewing some clothes, Mrs Jane Carlyle wrote a letter to Mrs Mary Russell:

a letter from me would have crossed yours (with the book) on the road, if it hadn't been for a jacket! Things are so oddly hooked together in this world. The connection in this case is simple enough. I needed a little jacket for home wear, and, possessing a superfluous black silk scarf, I resolved, in a moment of economical enthusiasm, to make with my own hands a jacket out of it. For, in spite of the 'thirty thousand distressed needle-women' one hears so much of, the fact remains that nobody can get a decent article of dress made here, unless at enormous cost. And besides, the dressmakers who can fit one won't condescend to make anything but with their own materials. So I fell to cutting out that jacket last Monday, and only finished it to-day (Friday)! and was so much excited over the unusual nature of the enterprise (for I detest sewing, and don't sew for weeks together) that I could not leave off, for anything that could be postponed, till the jacket was out of hands. But Lord preserve me, what a bother; better to have bought one ready-made at the dearest rate. I won't take a needle in my hands, except to sew on Mr C's buttons, for the next six months. By the way, would you like the shape of my jacket, which is of the newest? I have it on paper, and could send it to you quite handy.<sup>1</sup>

The letter suggests that Jane disliked sewing, but she used her black silk scarf to make a house jacket for reasons of economy and to ensure the quality of the material. Dressmakers preferred not to use customers' own materials, and a quality jacket made by a needlewoman was too expensive. After making the jacket, Jane decided not to sew for a few months, except for making the necessary repairs to her husband's buttons, as a demonstration of a wife's love. Overall, she was pleased with her jacket, so she wanted to share her paper patterns with Mary: the sharing of paper patterns was clearly a way for a middle-class woman to build friendships. This letter raises the question of how the sewing practices of middle-class women reinforced their identities in the mid-Victorian period.

Early studies of nineteenth-century dress production mainly provide details of the cut and construction of fashionable Victorian dress as well as of sewing techniques, rather than its social and cultural meanings, and later historians have tended to focus their attention on how hard poor women worked on needlework to earn a wage.<sup>2</sup> Other

<sup>1</sup> Froude (ed.), *Carlyle*, Vol. 2, p. 155, B&I:S4445-D070.

<sup>2</sup> On the construction of Victorian dress, see J. Arnold, *Patterns of Fashion: Englishwomen's Dresses and their Construction c. 1860-1940* (1967); idem, *Patterns of Fashion: Englishwomen's Dresses and their Construction c. 1660-1860* (1964); N. Waugh, *The Cut of Women's Clothes 1600-1930* (1968); idem, *Corsets and Crinolines* (1954). On women sewing for a living, see C. Rose (ed.), *Clothing, Society and Culture in Nineteenth-Century England*, Vol. 2: *Abuses and Reforms* (2011), pp. 1-123. L. M. Alexander,

popular research topics have been industrialisation and technological development.<sup>3</sup> There have, of course, been some exceptions. *The Subversive Stitch* (1984) by Rozsika Parker examines how embroidery was associated with femininity, yet omits to study the meanings behind plain sewing or indeed dressmaking.<sup>4</sup> Though *The Culture of Sewing* (1999), edited by Barbara Burman, explores the relationship between women and home dressmaking, most of the articles in the book date from the late nineteenth century at the earliest, partly because domestic sewing machines did not become popular until the late 1860s, and it does not explore the hand sewing done by pre-twentieth-century women.<sup>5</sup> Recently, *Representing Female Artistic Labour* (2006) by Patricia Zakreski has examined how working middle-class women did sewing for a living between 1848 and 1890, arguing that needlework was a means of exploring ‘the social and economic condition of female creativity and of locating this condition within a specifically female frame of experience’.<sup>6</sup> The archaeologist Mary C. Beaudry also analyses what sewing-related objects reveal about gender, personal and social identities and cultural meanings.<sup>7</sup> Last but not least, the research of Sarah Gordon explores how, why and what American women sewed at home in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, differentiating between different races, classes and regions.<sup>8</sup>

It is striking, however, that there has been no study of the relationship between English middle-class women and home sewing in the mid-Victorian period, a study

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*Women, Work, and Representation: Needlewomen in Victorian Art and Literature* (Ohio, 2003); C. Walkley, *The Ghost in the Looking Glass: The Victorian Seamstress* (1981); D. Bythell, *The Sweated Trades: Outwork in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (1978).

<sup>3</sup> On technological development, see J. Maclochlainn, *The Victorian Tailor: An Introduction to Period Tailoring* (2011); W. Aldrich, ‘The Impact of Fashion on the Cutting Practices for the Woman’s Tailored Jacket 1800-1927’, *Textile History*, 34:2(2003), 134-170; idem, ‘Tailors’ Cutting Manuals and the Growing Provision of Popular Clothing 1770-1870: ‘Falling Apart Like A Ready-Made’’, *Textile History*, 31:2(2000), 163-201; K. L. Seligman, ‘Dressmakers’ Patterns: The English Commercial Paper Pattern Industry, 1878-1950’, *Costume*, 37(2003), 95-113; idem, *Cutting for all! the Sartorial Arts Related Crafts and the Commercial Paper Pattern: A Bibliographic Reference Guide for Designers, Technicians and Historians* (Carbondale, IL, 1996); Emery, ‘Pattern’; W. Gamber, ‘“Reduced to Science”: Gender, Technology, and Power in the American Dressmaking Trade, 1860-1910”, *Technology and Culture*, 36:3(1995), 455-482; A. Godley, *Singer in Britain: the Diffusions of Sewing Machine Technology and its Impact on the Clothing Industry in United Kingdom, 1860-1905* (Reading, 1995); idem, *The Development of The UK Clothing Industry in the Long Run 1850-1950: A Review of the Data I- the Censuses of Population, and A Review of the Data II- the Censuses of Production* (Reading, 1994); idem, *The Emergence of Mass Production in the UK Clothing Industry* (Reading, 1994); W. Ewers, *Sincere’s History of the Sewing Machine* (Phoenix Arizona, 1970).

<sup>4</sup> R. Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (1984).

<sup>5</sup> B. Burman (ed.), *The Culture of Sewing: Gender, Consumption and Home Dressmaking* (Oxford, 1999); A. Godley, ‘The Development of the UK Clothing Industry, 1850-1950: Output and Productivity Growth’, *Business History*, 37:4(1995), 46-63(p. 56).

<sup>6</sup> P. Zakreski, *Representing Female Artistic Labour, 1848-1890: Refining Work for the Middle-Class Woman* (Aldershot, 2006), p. 58.

<sup>7</sup> M. C. Beaudry, *Findings: the Material Culture of Needlework and Sewing* (2006).

<sup>8</sup> S. A. Gordon, *‘Make it Yourself’: Home Sewing, Gender, and Culture, 1890-1930* (New York, 2009).



which could extend our knowledge of gender, class and identity. This chapter therefore argues that for such women home sewing was not only a female virtue and duty, but also a fashionable activity and a means of expression. The chapter is divided into three sections, the first of which explores how sewing was represented in mid-Victorian literature, how and why middle-class women had to learn sewing skills, and what the sewing box signified for a Victorian woman. The second section examines how advertisers created a link between the sewing machine and middle-class women, as well as the views on machine sewing of a variety of critics. The final section is concerned with the potential reasons why middle-class women sewed, and how they used home sewing to cement their family relationships and social networks.

The sources for the following analysis are based on 20 sewing manuals taken from the BL, and approximately 200 articles and 250 advertisements published in contemporary periodicals and drawn from GD, dating from between 1843 and 1875. This chapter also studies women's letters, diaries and enquiries published in women's magazines, with a view to seeking an explanation for why they sewed, who they sewed for, and for their attitudes to sewing and sewing implements. A surviving luxurious immobile sewing box was an important part of domestic decoration, and one that signalled the owner's social status. Engravings indicate the way the mid-Victorians publicised sewing and sewing machines, and fashion plates present how fashionable middle-class women of leisure used sewing machines. Paintings provide alternative views of a simple sewing box and of working-class women engaged in strenuous hand-sewing, and paper patterns help us to understand their accessibility for middle-class amateurs. Cartoons, on the other hand, show mid-Victorian viewpoints on machine-sewing, surviving dresses reveal how dresses were actually made by amateurs or by machine stitching, and inventories suggest how many mid-Victorian amateurs might have actually owned a sewing machine.

### **The Ideology of Home Sewing**

Rozsika Parker argues that embroidery and femininity were social constructs:

in the nineteenth century, embroidery and femininity were entirely fused, and the connection was deemed to be natural. Women embroidered because they were naturally feminine and were feminine because they naturally embroidered.<sup>9</sup>

This reminds us of Roland Barthes' argument that nothing is natural, and that no

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<sup>9</sup> Parker, *Stitch*, p. 11.

meaning is innate: everything reflects a pattern based on a particular culture.<sup>10</sup> This section therefore analyses how sewing and the sewing box were marked and bestowed with meaning in mid-Victorian literature, as well as how and why middle-class women learned their sewing skills.

According to the Bible, a virtuous woman carefully collected wool and flax that she would spin and use for making clothes for her family and household (Proverbs 31:13). In other words, a ‘good’ woman was required to be able to sew. *The Ladies’ Hand-Book of Millinery, Dress-Making, and Tatting* (1843) declared that this little book covered important subjects:

which will enable the noble minded females of England, to secure many blessings, of which they are at present deprived, to assume that respectability of appearance, with serenity and cheerfulness of mind, to cultivate those high moral faculties, which are glory of a nature, made only ‘a little lower than the angels’.<sup>11</sup>

This paragraph suggests that sewing was regarded as a method of shaping Victorian noble women’s morality, domesticity and femininity.<sup>12</sup> The article ‘An Angel of A Girl’ by the American author Harriet Beecher Stowe, as issued by *LN*, noted that ‘we think too little is made of this [sewing] in accomplishments of heroines’. Numerous daughters had read, written and cooked well, but an ‘angel of a girl’, who could sew beautifully, was the best of all of them.<sup>13</sup> This article was written by an American, but it corresponded to the English moral belief that sewing was an essential part of what was required to make a good woman, and there was an expectation that every Victorian woman should learn sewing when they were young. The article was therefore quite suitable for publication by the popular upmarket English women’s periodical.

Moreover, sewing was a popular issue in the long-running religious and children’s periodicals *CF*, *CC* and *Chatterbox*. The article ‘Be Sure Your Sin Will Find You Out’ by ‘Helena’, for example, pointed out that the daughters of the pious had to be taught verses from the Bible, the 3Rs (reading, writing, and arithmetic), and sewing.<sup>14</sup> This shows the importance of sewing for a devout and civilised girl. Another story, ‘What can I do for Jesus’, described how Jesus did not expect a girl to do a man’s work,

<sup>10</sup> R. Barthes, *Mythologies* (1972), trans. by A. Lavers. It was first published in French in 1957.

<sup>11</sup> [Anon.], *The Ladies’ Hand-Book of Millinery, Dress-Making, and Tatting* (1843), p. viii.

<sup>12</sup> Barbara Burman argues that home dressmaking was a distinguishing factor for English domesticity in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and as such was an expression of Englishness. B. Burman, “‘What A Deal of Work there is in A Dress!’: Englishness and Home Dressmaking in the Age of the Sewing Machine”, in Breward et al. (eds.), *Englishness*, pp. 79-96(p. 93).

<sup>13</sup> *LN*, 2 July 1853, Issue 340, p. 415, GD:DX1900462645.

<sup>14</sup> *CF*, 1 August 1856, Issue 392, p. 188, GD:DX1902087900.

but how her work was to follow her mother's requests, such as sewing or taking care of the baby.<sup>15</sup> This indicates that a 'good' daughter had to obey her mother, share the housework and prepare for her adulthood. In 'Laura's Self-Denial', the little girl Laura tried to make a pair of slippers for her father's birthday, suggesting that sewing was viewed as a gift which enabled her to display her care and love for her family.<sup>16</sup> From a Christian viewpoint, by sewing a good woman honoured God.

Sewing was a method of female moral regulation and self-discipline. In 'Dora and her Little Friend', Dora Harley, who had been reading but was lazy as regards sewing, told her mother that she wished to become a 'great' woman. Her mother, who was plying her needle at the time, answered her:

if our own pleasure is our object in life, we are sure never to find it; but if we try to glorify God by believing of Christ, loving and obeying him, and, from love to him, doing all the good we can, then happiness will be certain, the way to become a great woman is to be, through God's grace, a good girl.

After this conversation, Dora quickly finished her sewing.<sup>17</sup> Another story, 'Sewing Aches', described how a small girl, Jessie, was asked to make herself a little pillowcase, which was not too much work for a girl who had her own work-basket, at least from the viewpoint of Jessie's mother. Jessie also thought that she should be willing to sew because she had her own work-basket, but later on she claimed that she had a dreadful pain in her side, and that her thumb was sore and her hand tired, and that 'there was something the matter with her foot and her eye'. Before her mother took her to see the doctor, Jessie told her mother that 'they were sewing-aches'. This story continually noted that many little girls had sewing-aches whenever their parents had work for them to do, explaining that these sewing-aches were symptoms of a sad disease which made children 'cross', 'fretful', 'disabling', 'troublesome' and 'unhappy'.<sup>18</sup> These two stories imply that little girls might be quite resistant to sewing, but that they had to overcome their natural inclinations and conquer distressful symptoms in order to become 'good' women, or women who had acquired self-control.

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 April 1870, Issue CXII, p. 51, GD:DX1902016894.

<sup>16</sup> *CC*, 1 June 1873, Issue 54, p. 94, GD:DX1901661142.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 February 1862, Issue 206, p. 33, GD:DX1901661815.

<sup>18</sup> *CF*, 1 February 1867, Issue LXXIV, p. 23, GD:DX1902016060.

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Fig. 4-1 A Little Sewing Girl, *Chatterbox*, Issue 29, 15 June 1870, p. 225, GD:DX1901688620.

A sewing box or workbox was more than simply a ‘container to hold needlework and tools’, but was a precious object for a Victorian woman.<sup>19</sup> It represented the transformation from a girl, who depended on her mother’s support, to a little ‘woman’, who could produce something for herself or her family, thus taking care of others.<sup>20</sup> A story entitled “Kitty and ‘Almost’” describes a birthday present for Kitty, a complete workbox with scissors, thimble and needles, from her Uncle Curtis. ‘It gave a great spur to Kitty’s love of sewing. She did not like a needle and thread before; now she did’. This highlights the fact that for a girl, a sewing box was a cherished marker of femininity, and one which encouraged her to carry out her domestic duties.<sup>21</sup> Figure 4-1 illustrates the little girl with her work-basket, with the inscription ‘I can’t quite thread my needle yet, they make the hole so small’, revealing how the little girl is struggling hard to sew in order to be a good woman.<sup>22</sup> Another example, from Wilcox & Gibbs’ advertisements (Figure 4-2), portrays groups of women in the company’s showroom purchasing sewing accessories, with one of the clerks kindly shows a little girl a

<sup>19</sup> K. Ledbetter, *Victorian Needlework* (Santa Barbara, CA, 2012), p. 174. A sewing box could also hold writing or painting supplies, as well as reading material.

<sup>20</sup> Vickery argues that ‘boxes in the shape of cottages reinforced the domesticity, innocence and old-fashion virtue of sewing’; also, a box signified the emergent individuality of children. A. Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: at Home in Georgian England* (2009), pp. 283, 45.

<sup>21</sup> *CF*, 1 May 1863, Issue XXIX, p. 66, GD:DX1902089836.

<sup>22</sup> *Chatterbox*, 15 June 1870, Issue 29, p. 225, GD:DX1901688620.

work-basket.<sup>23</sup> This shows how women tried hard to instil sewing, as a constructor of morality, into the next generation, and how merchants used this idea of passing on moral values to advertise their shops, which thereby took part in this virtuous process as their customers did. Jane Hamlett goes on to argue that, to a grieving mother, a workbox may symbolise the perfect child.<sup>24</sup>

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Fig. 4-2 Wilcox & Gibbs Sewing Accessory Shop, *Peter Parley's Annual*, [Date Unknown], p. 344, GD:DX1901718607.

In addition, women could make themselves a sewing basket or decorate their sewing boxes to show their taste and sewing skills.<sup>25</sup> A sewing box could be simple and portable, so that women could carry it when on visits or trips. *Beeton's Complete Etiquette for Ladies* advised women to 'bring no large sewing into the ladies' drawing-room, and nothing that will produce clippings or litter'.<sup>26</sup> A good piece of sewing could also make a great conversation topic among women, and as Lesley Hoskins points out, 'Gaskell's novels show women sewing as a matter of course while visitors were present'.<sup>27</sup> Some workboxes were made of mother-of-pearl, ivory, bone or tortoiseshell, with several individual drawers, as an item of home décor and an indicator

<sup>23</sup> 'Messrs Wilcox and Gibbs Sewing Machine Company, 135 Regent Street, London', *Peter Parley's Annual: A Christmas and New Year's Present for Young People* (1840-92), [Date Unknown], p. 344, GD:DX1901718607.

<sup>24</sup> Hamlett, *Material Relations*, p. 187.

<sup>25</sup> Women's magazines sometimes provided information on how to make a sewing box. See 'Boudoir Work Basket', *LN*, 11 October 1862, Issue 824, p. 232, GD:DX1900493311; *Ibid.*, 25 October 1862, Issue 826, p. 264, GD:DX1900493421. Vickery comments that such boxes were an expression of a cabinetmaker's virtuosity. Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, p. 39.

<sup>26</sup> Beeton, *Etiquette*, p.54.

<sup>27</sup> Hoskins, *Inventory*, p. 188.



of social status (Figure 4-3). Figure 4-4, *Mrs James Wyatt Jr and her Daughter Sarah* (c. 1850), by the English Pre-Raphaelite painter John Everett Millais (1829-96), depicts Eliza Moorman (1813-95), the daughter-in-law of Mr James Wyatt (1774-1853), with her one-year-old daughter Sarah (1849-1916) in a civilised feminine setting: a women's periodical printed with a fashion plate, dolls and a sewing box containing needle and thread and attached to a miniature. This suggests that little girls were unconsciously educated through being surrounded by feminine objects.<sup>28</sup>



Fig. 4-3 A Papier-Mâché Workbox with Painted Decoration and Shell Inlay (1840-70), V&A:W.13:1 to 11-1951.



Fig. 4-4 *Mrs James Wyatt Jr and her Daughter Sarah* (c. 1850), John Everett Millais, Tate Gallery:T03858.

<sup>28</sup> On dolls shaping girls' gender identity, see Hamlett, *Material Relations*, pp. 126-127; on links between dolls and the erotic, see Marcus, *Women*, pp. 149, 160-161.

Sewing allowed a woman to perform her domestic roles, as a daughter, a mother and a wife, and developed virtues like gratitude, humility, obedience and thrift. 'A Word to the Girls' by J. W. F., issued by *LT*, urged, for example:

don't let over-burdened fathers think you incumbrances; don't let mothers complain that you are hindrances, not helps, with your fine airs and idle habits; don't let husbands think they have married dolls, when they imagined they had found companions; don't let your children imagine that mamma is only fit to be teased and worried, and not to be treated with respect and affection.

The author went on to propose that sewing was an aid to female comfort in the home and to tidiness in clothing, saved a father's or husband's purse, and made her a model for both children and servants.<sup>29</sup> 'The Needle', as printed in *Chatterbox*, also declared:

who amongst us has not a great reverence for that little dainty tool, such a wonderful brightener and consoler; our weapon of defence against slothfulness, weariness, and sad thoughts; our thrifty helper in poverty, our pleasant friend at all times? From the first 'cobbled-up' doll's frock, the first neat stitching for mother, or hemming of father's pocket-handkerchief; the first bit of sewing shyly done for some one who is to own the hand and all its duties; most of all, the first strange, delicious fancy work, sewed at diligently, in solemn faith and tender love, for the tiny creature as yet unknown and unseen: – truly, no one but ourselves can tell what the needle is to us women.<sup>30</sup>

The needle was thus a woman's 'weapon' against 'sad thoughts' and 'poverty', helping her to fulfil her duties and to show her 'faith' and 'love'. Sewing did help a woman to make money, but for a respectable middle-class woman, saving family money was of course more important than earning it.

Sewing was in any case a valuable female accomplishment. In 1860, *The Needle* by Roxey Caplin claimed that the needle influenced the character and condition of women, and led women in the direction of art, fashion, high standards of dress and employment.<sup>31</sup> A woman who had a knowledge of sewing knew how much material she needed (so she would not spend more money on purchasing extra fabric), how to dress well to represent her social status, and how to adapt the latest fashions to her taste. In 1868, 'Romance of the Needle', published by *WF*, waxed lyrical:

what a wonderful thing is sewing. It began in Paradise, and was the earliest fruit of the fall. [...] The needle with the thimble has done more for man than the needle of the compass. The pleasantest things in the world are pleasant thoughts, and the greatest art in life is to have as many of them as possible.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> *LT*, 1 August 1861, p. 251, GD:DX1901524962.

<sup>30</sup> *Chatterbox*, 7 July 1874, Issue 32, p. 255, GD:DX1901315078.

<sup>31</sup> R. A. Caplin, *The Needle: its History and Utility* (1860), p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> *WF*, 1 September 1868, Issue 537, p. 7, GD:DX1902138215.

Sewing is here considered as both a way of bringing a woman pleasure and of allowing her to enjoy her achievements. This could be because this periodical was largely targeted at upper middle-class women who had no financial difficulties, and who could afford household servants or to order tailor-made dresses. For them, sewing was not a matter of necessity but of satisfaction. It is clear that sewing represented different meanings for different categories of women.

Most Victorian girls learned their first sewing skills at home from their mother or elder sisters. In wealthy families, little girls might have been taught by a governess or servants. One advertisement published by *Punch*, for example, proclaimed:

wanted, a Daily Governess. Hours ten to six. For three children, aged eight, ten, and eleven. Requirements, English, French, Music, and Needlework (and perhaps Drawing). Salary to commence at seven shillings per week.<sup>33</sup>

Though many rich mothers hardly sewed themselves, they still wanted their girls to be trained in sewing skills, in order to project not only an ideal image of a 'good' woman but also to instruct them in desirable virtues. Doing ornamental needlework also showed that a woman had the time and money to cultivate her taste and artistic side. However, *The Ladies' Book of Needle Work* described how in schools 'only a very small part of the time is devoted to needle-work, the rest is taken up with music, foreign languages, practising dancing and the useless smattering of encyclopaedical knowledge'.<sup>34</sup> Likewise, the article 'Sewing in Country Schools' noted that girls could not learn proper sewing skills in schools because schoolmistresses were not paid to teach sewing.<sup>35</sup> Middle-class girls might therefore be expected to acquire basic sewing skills, but not dressmaking.

With the development of paper patterns, dressmaking became an easy and cheap way for middle-class women to acquire fashionable dresses. Although in the early nineteenth century paper patterns could be bought from tailors or shops, they were costly (eight shillings per set of paper patterns) and as such mainly used by professionals.<sup>36</sup> In August 1851, *WF* began to publish paper patterns with the aim of providing its English readers with the knowledge of how to make their dresses in the

<sup>33</sup> 'A Rare Opening', *Punch*, 16 October 1875, p.152, GD:DX1901932467.

<sup>34</sup> J. D. and J. M. V. G. Georgens, *The Ladies' Book of Needle Work* (1872), p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> *The Royal Cornwall Gazette, Falmouth Packet, and General Advertiser* (1803-1900) (Truro), 26 July 1873, Issue 3,652, p. 7, GD:R3212918102. On working-class women sewing in schools, see Richmond and Rose (eds.), *Clothing*, Vol. 3, pp. 1-56.

<sup>36</sup> Emery, 'Pattern', p. 79; Ashelford, *Art*, p. 204.

best taste and fashionable style (Figure 4-5).<sup>37</sup> At that time, though, not many middle-class women could regularly afford the one-shilling monthly edition, and naturally upper-class ladies would not have needed to make their dresses by hand. In May 1852, the first successful middle-class periodical, *EDM*, started to offer its readers diagrams of dresses with concise instructions, announcing that these could help women to easily make their own dresses.<sup>38</sup> Its readers complained, however, that it was not easy for them to understand the diagrams because they were drawn without any sizes or proportions.<sup>39</sup> In due course, *EDM* began to supply scaled patterns, and from May 1860 onwards it started to sell an affordable one-shilling edition with special supplements, including embroidery designs, needlework and full-scale paper patterns (Figure 4-6). The magazine's sales volume dramatically increased from 25,000 a month in 1854 to 50,000 copies in 1860.<sup>40</sup> After this, paper patterns for dressmaking were heavily promoted as a fashionable activity for middle-class women in most mid-Victorian women's magazines.

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Fig. 4-5 The Diagram of Sewing Pattern of *Windsor Manteau*, *WF*, 1 November 1852, Issue 347, GD:DX1902139347.

<sup>37</sup> Emery, 'Pattern', p. 90; Ashelford, *Art*, p. 204; A. Adburgham, *Shops and Shopping 1800-1914: Where, and in What Manner the Well-Dressed Englishwoman Bought her Clothes* (1964), p. 115.

<sup>38</sup> For *EDM*, see Chapter 2, pp. 80-81.

<sup>39</sup> *EDM*, September 1852, Vol. I, p. 165.

<sup>40</sup> White, *Magazines*, p. 46.

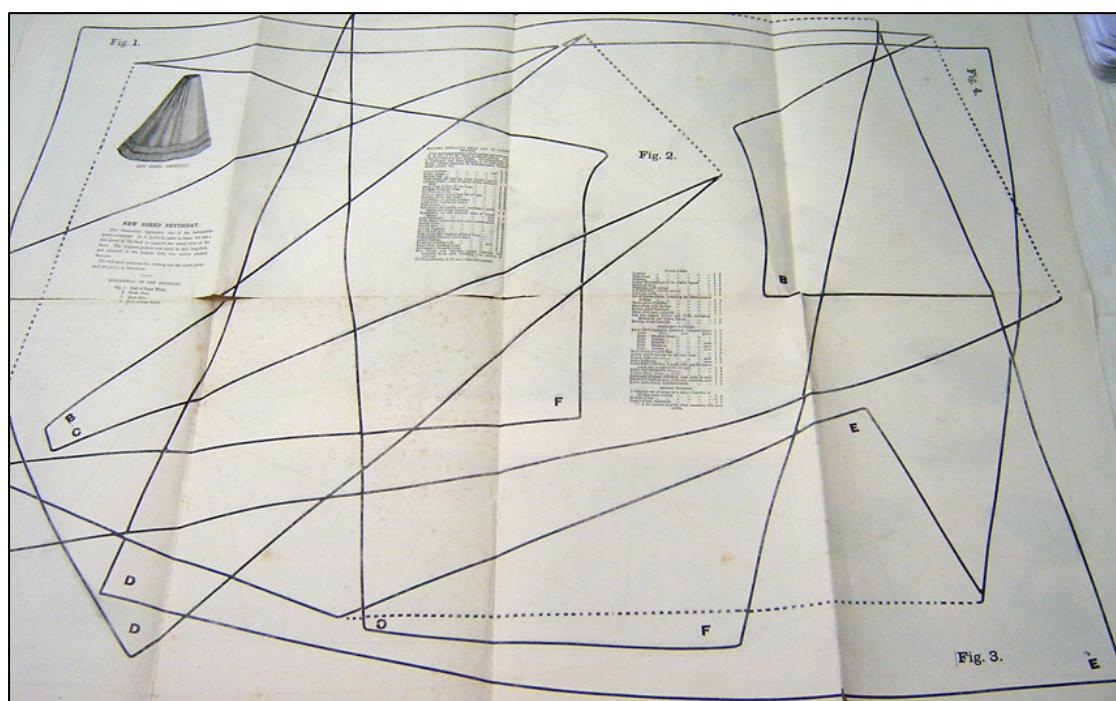


Fig. 4-6 The Full-Scale Sewing Pattern of New Gored Petticoat, *EDM*, 1 April 1867, WM:65/537.

As middle-class women had been trained in basic sewing, women's magazines mainly sought to supply their readers with simple but fashionable paper patterns, for mantles, jackets and skirts, for example, and readers were often advised to buy more complicated patterns from particular dressmakers' shops.<sup>41</sup> Most women readers were self-taught through a mixture of magazine articles, step-by-step sewing instructions and discussions with family, friends or magazine editors, though some wealthy ones might have attended dressmaking lessons. It should be noted, though, that in 1855 Mrs Judd's series of lessons on the art of dressmaking cost 10s.6d., including mantle and sleeve patterns, while private lessons cost one guinea.<sup>42</sup> There was a significant increase in dressmaking articles, columns and enquiries, as well as advertisements for dressmaking lessons, in mid-Victorian women's magazines. Few paper patterns for dressmaking have survived in the BL, however, and only a limited number in FM, ML and WM, suggesting that mid-Victorian women did actually use these patterns to make their dresses. It is difficult to know, though, to what extent patterns were used over and over again, or circulated among middle-class women or sold on to the second-hand market.

Whilst some women's periodicals, such as *NMBA*, *LF* and *Queen*, never published paper patterns for dressmaking, this did not mean that these magazines' readers were not interested in dressmaking. In one of the enquiries published by *Queen*

<sup>41</sup> There were different price ranges for commercial patterns, depending on the quality and style of the pattern. People who could not afford paper patterns could of course unpick an old dress instead.

<sup>42</sup> E. Judd, *Mrs Judd's Illustrated Handbook for Self-Instruction in the Art of Dress-Making, Etc* (1855), p. 16.



in 1875, for example, the reader 'Desperation' asked 'where can your ladies be taught practical dressmaking? Is there any book which would give thorough instruction on the subject?'<sup>43</sup> A few weeks later, the editor advised readers to take dressmaking lessons from Mrs Mitchell at 60 Welbeck Street, as there was no book that could really teach the essential practical knowledge of the subject.<sup>44</sup> This is one of the reasons why this chapter is based on articles from periodicals rather than on sewing books, which usually limited themselves to supplying small diagrams of a basic bodice, with the result that only a skilful reader with the knowledge of how to enlarge paper patterns and to alter them in accordance with the latest fashion would be able to use them. By 1875, even general newspapers published articles on dressmaking: *Manchester Times* (1828-1900), for instance, republished in 1875 a series entitled 'Dressmaking at Home', taken from *EDM*.<sup>45</sup>

In short, sewing was viewed as a female moral imperative in terms of constructing an idealised image of woman, but with the development of paper patterns women could easily make simple but fashionable clothes by themselves. Sewing shifted to dressmaking, and was promoted as a pleasant activity for middle-class women, rather than as, traditionally, an activity to encourage self-discipline. Another important invention which led to an acceleration in women's fashion and improved the quality of women's lives in the mid-Victorian period was the sewing machine, which we shall examine now.

### **Sewing Machines, Fashion and Femininity**

The sewing machine was patented in 1846 by the American Elias Howe (1819-67). It was promoted in Britain by William F. Thomas (b. 1829), and later improved by Isaac Merritt Singer (1811-75).<sup>46</sup> Sewing machines soon became the most widely-advertised item in mid-Victorian women's magazines and general newspapers and periodicals, turning into a social phenomenon that historians must take into account if they are to understand changes in meanings in terms of sewing. Nancy Page Fernandez, for example, argues that in mid-nineteenth century America the domestic sewing machine

<sup>43</sup> 'Notes and Queries on Dress', *Queen*, 17 April 1875, p. 259.

<sup>44</sup> 'Answers', *Queen*, 1 May 1875, p. 291.

<sup>45</sup> *Manchester Times*, 18 September 1875, GD:BC3206441195.

<sup>46</sup> Breward, *Fashion*, p. 54. The history of sewing machines is complex and may be traced back to the early eighteenth century. The first man to put a sewing machine into practical operation was Barthélemy Thimonnier (1793-1857), and the first machine recognisable as a sewing machine was invented by Water Hunt (1796-1860), in 1834. G. R. Cooper, *The Sewing Machines: Its Invention and Development* (Washington, D.C., 1976).

was considered to be a ‘woman’s best friend’, a ‘mother’s helper’ and the ‘Angel of the House’.<sup>47</sup> Michael Snodin and John Styles state that black-japanned sewing machines looked like tea caddies, and functioned as luxurious drawing room accoutrements in Victorian England.<sup>48</sup> This section aims to investigate how British advertisers created a connection between the domestic sewing machine and middle-class women and how sewing machines inspired pleasure and anxiety in both men and women.

Until the late 1860s, sewing machines were costly and only affordable for a family in possession of a middle-class income, at very least. In 1858, Newton Wilson’s Boudoir sewing machine cost £10.10s., and in 1859 Francis Gibson’s hand-sewing machine was priced at £3.3s.<sup>49</sup> Sewing machine advertisers used celebrities as their patrons to add their prestige and to attract consumers. Newton Wilson Co., for instance, claimed that its sewing machines were used ‘by the Queen and the ladies of the Court, and by thousands of the clergy and gentry, to whom reference can be given’.<sup>50</sup> Lady Alfred Spencer-Churchill (1832-1901) endorsed Messrs. Finkle & Lyon sewing machines as ‘the best machine for household purposes’,<sup>51</sup> and Wheeler & Wilson claimed that its machines were ‘pleasant and agreeable’ for ‘nobility’ and ‘gentry’ ladies.<sup>52</sup> S. Smith Co. advertised the fact that the Agenoria hand-sewing machine was recommended by the Crown Princess of Prussia, the Sultan of Turkey and the Nawab Nazim of Bengal.<sup>53</sup> In these cases, a domestic sewing machine was sold on the basis of being a symbol of a user’s social status rather than a practical function.

As sewing was used to construct Victorian femininity, domestic sewing machines were advertised as a gendered object. Because of different ranges of consumers, sewing machine companies used different images of femininity to promote their products. One of Newton Wilson’s advertisements in 1858 (Figure 4-7), for example, described how ‘in an Old England village, both thrifty and neat’, ‘lovely and pure grew the clergyman’s daughter’ Jane, dressed in a ‘high in the throat’ style, who used the ‘Boudoir’ sewing machine to do her needlework. ‘From fairies you’d think she

<sup>47</sup> N. P. Fernandez, ‘Creating Consumers: Gender, Class and the Family Sewing Machine’, in Burman (ed.), *Sewing*, pp.157-168(p. 157).

<sup>48</sup> M. Snodin and J. Styles, *Design and the Decorative Arts, Britain 1500-1900* (2001), p. 453.

<sup>49</sup> *The Englishwoman’s Review* (1857-1900), 9 October 1858, Issue 65, p. 208, GD:DX1900501636. It was a feminist periodical. *LF*, 1 October 1859, Issue 157, GD:DX1901617678.

<sup>50</sup> *LN*, 22 February 1862, Issue 791, p. 126, GD:DX1900491393.

<sup>51</sup> *John Bull* (1820-92) (hereafter *JB*), 17 May 1862, Issue 2,162, p. 319, GD:DX1900658120. It was a Tory weekly periodical, and targeted conservative upper and middle-class readers.

<sup>52</sup> *LF*, 1 October 1866, Issue 241, p. 241, GD:DX1901617370.

<sup>53</sup> *JB*, 24 December 1870, Issue 2,611, p. 879, GD:DX1900555117. Agenoria was the Roman goddess of silence and industry, giving relief from pain and anxiety and endowing children with capabilities like walking, singing and reasoning. In this case, so silent a sewing machine would help its user to improve her sewing skills, and provide relief from pain and anxiety.

had borrow'd a wand, indicating that such a innovation brought 'thrifty' Christian women a great pleasure.<sup>54</sup> This rural 'old England' imagery chimed with longer-term representation of sewing as a traditional female activity and virtue. The very name of this machine suggests that it was an important appliance for the boudoir, and one which any upper middle-class woman should have.<sup>55</sup>

Permission to use this image not granted.

Fig. 4-7 The Boudoir Sewing Machine, *The Englishwoman's Review*, Issue 65, 9 October 1858, p. 208, GD:DX1900501636.

On the other hand, in 1860, the advertisement of C. T. Judkins showed the sitter, dressed in a fashionable flounced dress, working on her 'elastic' stitch 'novelty' sewing machine, announcing that the company would teach buyers how to use such a machine in its London depot (Figure 4-8), and pointing out that by using the machine, 'elastic' stitches would create a neat, pretty fitted dress for its urban customers, and by doing so make women's clothing budget 'elastic' too.<sup>56</sup> In another advertisement for Newton Wilson's 'Chain-Stitch, Lock-Stitch, and Knotted-Stitch' sewing machines, in 1862 (Figure 4-9), the advertising figure wore a three-quarter sleeved dress trimmed with lace and rosettes, claiming that Newton Wilson's were 'the only machines that will do braiding and embroidering', and that they were 'used by the Queen, and the ladies of the Court'.<sup>57</sup> This advert was meant to suggest that these exclusive functions were appreciated by the gentry, and that a woman who purchased this machine could dress themselves as the gentry did. Home sewing machines 'connected to modern

<sup>54</sup> *The Englishwoman's Review*, 9 October 1858, Issue 65, p. 208, GD:DX1900501636.

<sup>55</sup> On sewing machines as a domestic ornament, see N. Oddy, 'A Beautiful Ornament in the Parlour or Boudoir: The Domestication of the Sewing Machines', in Burman (ed.), *Sewing*, pp. 285-302.

<sup>56</sup> *LF*, 1 November 1860, Issue 170, GD:DX1901618003.

<sup>57</sup> *LN*, 22 February 1862, Issue 791, p. 126, GD:DX1900491393.

transformations underway in women's dress', and represented a sense of the user's modern self.<sup>58</sup>

Permission to use this image not granted.

Fig. 4-8 Jukins' Elastic Stitch Novelty Sewing Machines, *LF*, 1 November 1860, Issue 170, GD:DX1901618003.

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Fig. 4-9 Newton Wilson's 'Chain-Stitch, Lock-Stitch, and Knotted-Stitch' Sewing Machines, *LN*, 22 February 1862, Issue 791, p. 126, GD:DX1900491393.

Furthermore, advertisers often proposed an idealised dream to their customers: namely, that with the help of the sewing machine middle-class women could achieve the control over their lives enjoyed by upper-class ladies. In 1873, Whight & Mann Co. proclaimed its machines to be a lady's 'good servant' (Figure 4-10); in 1874, *Judy*

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<sup>58</sup> A. Gordon, *Fabricating Consumers: the Sewing Machine in Modern Japan* (Berkeley, CA, 2012), p. 23.

announced ‘Mamma’s little helper – a sewing machine’.<sup>59</sup> Such advertisements reflected the idea that a machine gave middle-class daughters, wives and mothers additional time to enjoy the things that they liked to do. Similarly, one of Whight & Mann’s products, depicted in Figure 4-10 and called ‘Little Darling’, was advertised as ‘a good servant’, which relieved its owner of hard work. Moreover, the aristocratic-sounding names of some sewing machines implied that middle-class women yearned to be able to aspire to the lives of upper-class ladies, as was the case of Wheeler & Wilson’s Belgravia sewing machines (from £7.7s. to £21.), Whight & Mann’s Princess hand lock-stitch machine (four guineas), Oliver Co.’s ‘superior’ lever hand-sewing machine – the Princess Alice (4 1/2 guineas); Newton Wilson’s the Queen Mab (£3.3s.), Cleopatra (£4.4s.) and May Queen (6 1/2 guineas), and S. Smith Co.’s ‘the Princess of Wales’ (£4.4s.) and ‘Alexandra’ (£9.).<sup>60</sup> The use of the names of powerful female figures reinforced the sense that the sewing machines were in some way ‘feminine’ as well as sources of authority, which was of course impressive in itself.

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Fig. 4-10 The Advertisement for the ‘Little Darling’ Sewing Machine, *LF*, 1 December 1873, Issue 327, GD:DX1901614570.

Apart from being sold as conferring rank, sewing machines were promoted as a good companion for a woman. *The Ladies’ Hand-Book* claimed that ‘it [needle] is a home friend; and while it confers upon us all unnumbered blessings, it is a source both

<sup>59</sup> *LF*, 1 December 1873, Issue 327, GD:DX1901614570; ‘Fine Arts at Slocum Podger’, *Judy*, 19 August 1874, p. 174, GD:DX1901652018.

<sup>60</sup> *EDM*, 1 July 1868, Issue 43, p. 15, GD:DX1901421289; *LF*, 1 October 1868, Issue 265, p. 80, GD:DX1901607990; *JB*, 3 December 1868, Issue 2,468, p. 226, GD:DX1900548183; *Ibid.*, 24 December 1870, Issue 2,611, p. 879, GD:DX1900555117; *Good Words for the Young* (1868-72), 1 October 1869, Issue 12, GD:DX1902147534.



of utility and pleasure, that is within the reach of all'.<sup>61</sup> A servant was someone who helped the mistress to do certain work in her household, but a friend was for loving, helping, playing and comforting her all of the time. Advertisers therefore applied this concept to sewing machines, too. Wilcox & Gibbs Co. noted that its noiseless family sewing machine was 'the companion of a lady', that the sleeping infant would not be disturbed by this 'promoter of comfort', and that it was the 'willing slave to the lady's hand'.<sup>62</sup> Bartlett's Patent Reversible Sewing Machine, on the other hand, called itself the 'Friend of the Family', while Whight & Mann's machine promoted itself as 'a woman's best friend' (Figure 4-11).<sup>63</sup> The implication was that a user-friendly sewing machine understood what its 'friend' needed, and that it would not cause her any trouble.

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Fig. 4-11 The Advertisement for the 'Best Friend' Sewing Machine, *WF*, 1 April 1873, Issue 592, GD:DX1902143528.

Domestic sewing machines improved the quality of middle-class women's lives, and also constructed men's position and masculinity. Wilcox & Gibbs Co. noted that its sewing machines were 'perfect for domestic use', and emancipated every housewife from 'the drudgery of the needle'.<sup>64</sup> In 1868, the weekly magazine *JB* published an article under the title of 'A wife's comfort':

it [a sewing machine] is both delicate and simple in design, so much so that it would form no unsightly ornament to the drawing-room. While it is strong enough to sew cloth its touch is sufficiently light for the finest muslin, and it is by far the most rapid in its action of any sewing machine. [...] And will not the sewing machine bring joy into the family circle? We know it will. It would be difficult to imagine a greater contrast than the drudgery the old hand-sewing presents to that performed by the machine. The toil, the

<sup>61</sup> *Ladies' Hand-Book*, p. 49.

<sup>62</sup> *LF*, 1 December 1865, Issue 231, p. 96, GD:DX1901617144. Also see above at n. 53, p. 184.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 June 1867, Issue 249, p. 48, GD:DX1901607622; *WF*, 1 April 1873, Issue 592, GD:DX1902143528.

<sup>64</sup> *LN*, 26 January 1862, Issue 800, p. 271, GD:DX1900491914.

uninteresting toil of drawing the needle through the hundreds [...] a wife who has been employed for a month making a set of shirts is always at a discount as regards cheerfulness when her husband comes home, and hopes to see her bright and happy.<sup>65</sup>

According to this advertising article, a sewing machine, which was not only a fashionable ornament for furnishing a middle-class house, but also a practical object for reducing the time a wife spent sewing, brought great joy into the home. This article also implies that a wife who did hand-sewing was a 'good' companion, but that she might not be a cheerful companion to her husband: a caring husband ought really to buy such a machine if he hoped to see his wife 'bright and happy'. Snodin and Styles point out the way sewing machines were decorated like objects of papier-mâché in order to make them acceptable in a domestic setting.<sup>66</sup> In another example, the Florence Sewing Machine made claims to be 'the best family sewing machine in the world':

the man who sports a costly watch or expensive jewellery, when his wife, with weary fingers and heavy heart, is wearing away her life at midnight, stitching for the children while they sleep, for the want of a sewing machine is shamefully thoughtless, or worse – heartless. Buy a 'Florence' for your friend, your sister, or wife; it will shorten her toil, and lengthen her life.<sup>67</sup>

This suggests that if a man were a breadwinner able to purchase luxury products, then he should be able to buy a sewing machine for his wife, sister or friend. A sewing machine was supposed to relieve a woman of her domestic 'drudgery', so that she would not be exhausted and her body would remain healthy. A sewing machine was therefore a signifier of modern femininity. This advertisement also reveals that some middle-class women might feel ashamed to ask for a sewing machine, perhaps owing to a traditional culture in which women were not allowed to operate machines.<sup>68</sup> These two advertisements suggest that Victorian men were expected to be in charge of decisions on expensive purchases outside the usual household budget, but also focused on the need for them to show their consideration and domesticity.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>65</sup> *JB*, 31 October 1868, Issue 2,499, p. 739, GD:DX1900549780.

<sup>66</sup> Snodin and Styles, *Design*, p. 453.

<sup>67</sup> *LF*, 1 January 1868, Issue 256, p. 8, GD:DX1901607789.

<sup>68</sup> J. G. Coffin, 'Credit, Consumption, and Images of Women's Desires: Selling the Sewing Machine in Late Nineteenth-Century France', *French Historical Studies*, 18:3(1994), 749-783(p. 757).

<sup>69</sup> As Vickery argues, 'while a wife's consumption was predominantly repetitive and mundane, a husband's consumption was by construct characteristically occasional and impulsive, or expensive and dynastic'. A. Vickery, 'His and Hers: Gender, Consumption and Household Accounting in Eighteenth-Century England', in L. Roper and R. Harros (eds.), *The Art of Survival: Essays in Honour of Olwen Hufton* (Oxford: 2006), pp. 12-38(p. 16). Cohen states that middle-class mid-Victorian men actively controlled the domestic interior. Cohen, *Household Gods*, p. 60 Hamlett points out that Victorian men maintained an attitude of genteel domesticity, and took pride in home-making. Hamlett, *Material Relations*, pp. 88-90.



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Fig. 4-12 The Sewing Woman with A Visitor in Garden, *LF*, 1 July 1865, WM.

Fig. 4-13 The Group of Sewing Women, *LF*, 1 March 1869, Issue 270, GD:DX1901608074.

Fashion plates displayed fashionable dresses as well as fashionable culture.<sup>70</sup>

Figure 4-12 shows a seated woman sewing in her garden when a friend comes to visit her. This represents sewing as a pleasurable activity, aided by a small, portable sewing machine. Wheeler & Wilson Co. announced that its new sewing machine included an umbrella or parasol stand which protected the user from the sun and rain when using it outdoors.<sup>71</sup> This suggests that a number of women tended to do their needlework outdoors, and it might also have been a way to display their machines to passing spectators. Sewing activities thus moved from a private drawing room to a semi-private home garden, reflecting the fact that sewing was not only a self-improving activity to construct the inner value of a woman, but also an exciting activity which could help to maintain her outer appearance. Figure 4-13 portrays two well-dressed ladies engaged in instruction or sharing their sewing experiences with another lady, who is working on her treadle sewing machine in either a parlour or a drawing room, indicating that sewing was not just an individual activity but a fashionable group activity.<sup>72</sup> In 1871, the diaries of Alice Mary Moore Wade (1850-71), who was the youngest child of Ponsonby Arthur Moore (1816-71) and Augusta Sophia Gardner (d. 1908), mentioned that ‘a number of people came to see my sewing-machine at work’, and that ‘they were

<sup>70</sup> On fashion plates, see Chapter 2, pp. 91-96.

<sup>71</sup> *LN*, 19 October 1861, Issue 773, p. 249, GD:DX1900490317.

<sup>72</sup> Hamlett comments that ‘the dining room also contained a range of goods associated with female occupation’, such as workboxes and sewing machines. Hamlett, *Material Relations*, p. 44.

delighted with it [machine-sewing]'.<sup>73</sup>

As far as mid-Victorian visual sources are concerned, fashion plates show female figures with pianos more often than with sewing machines, and yet in periodicals pianos were less often advertised than sewing machines. Wheeler & Wilson Co. claimed that the natural order was 'necessaries, first, then luxuries', and hence the sewing machine should logically come before the piano.<sup>74</sup> On the other hand, engravings and paintings of the period seem to centre on ranks of poor women working hard on their hand sewing, such as *Virtue and Vice* (1853) by John Everett Millais (1829-96), and *The Song of the Shirt* (1854) by Anne Elizabeth Blunden (1830-1915). *The Song of the Shirt* (1875) by Frank Holl (1845-88), for example, shows three poor women in mourning having to sew for a living (Figure 4-14). One woman is making a blue dress, another is sewing a corset, while the other, holding a pair of scissors, is dozing. Additionally, at least according to mid-Victorian studio *cartes-de-visite* studied for our purposes, there were a few Victorian women who used needlework to reinforce their normative femininity, but most sitters tended to hold a book in due accordance with the established image of an educated woman.<sup>75</sup>

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Fig. 4-14 *The Song of the Shirt* (1875), Frank Holl, Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter (hereafter RAMM):17124.

From the 1860s onwards, sewing machines could be rented or paid for in

<sup>73</sup> A. S. Moore (ed.), *In Memoriam* (Edinburgh, 1872), 30 January 1871, B&I:S5198-D020; *Ibid.*, 23 March 1871, B&I:S5198-D033.

<sup>74</sup> *The Racing Times, and Amateur Dramatic Chronicle* (1851-68), 27 January 1868, Issue 879, p. 1, GD:DX1900816373.

<sup>75</sup> On sewing women in photography, see Chapter 3, p. 138.

instalments. Messrs. Watts & Co. sewing clubs advertised no entrance fees, liability or fines, and a cost of only 3s. per week for a sewing machine. Sewing clubs were quite suitable for:

persons, who have been in the habit of paying weekly as borrowers of sewing machines will not only save the money they now foolishly throw away, but at the same time secure to themselves the possession of one of the best and most celebrated sewing machines in the world.<sup>76</sup>

Through renting, more lower middle-class women had the opportunity to access a sewing machine, but a financially astute woman would acquire a machine for herself permanently through the payment of instalments. To take Wheeler & Wilson's machine advertisements in 1873, for example, a machine would cost from £6.6s. for a cash payment, or could be acquired via a small payment of 2s.6d. or 5s. per week, or 10s.6d. or 21s. per month, depending on the functions of the machine.<sup>77</sup> In 1875, Seth Miss' advertisements, as published by the weekly periodical *Women and Work* (1874-76), stated that:

time is money. The wife, the mother, the spinster, the child, all ladies should purchase a sewing machine for 1s. It reads like misprint, but it will be forwarded to all parts of the United Kingdom, carriage paid the family gem is the best time saver, in hemming, stitching, embroidery, &c.<sup>78</sup>

This acknowledges that women who sewed were often hard pressed for time, and that sewing machines were a timesaver. While different periodicals offered their readers different kinds of products, this text makes it clear that by 1875, a wider range of sewing machines had become available at prices that were affordable for different social classes. The daily newspaper *The Morning Post* (1773-1937) announced that 'no article of household use is now so much desired as a sewing machine', and that 'it is recognised as a necessity in every family'.<sup>79</sup> Home sewing machines were no longer the exclusive symbol of middle-class homes. In accordance with the view of the Scottish social philosopher Adam Smith (1723-90), social necessities were things which the 'established rules of decency have rendered necessary to the lowest rank of people'.<sup>80</sup> In other words, once 'luxury' sewing machines were now viewed as the epitome of 'decency', which was naturally a social 'necessity'.

However, not all commentators approved of the idea that sewing machines

<sup>76</sup> *JB*, 23 April 1864, Issue 2,263, p. 258, GD:DX1900572686.

<sup>77</sup> *LF*, 1 February 1872, Issue 305, GD:DX1901608605; *Ibid.*, 1 October 1872, Issue 313, GD:DX1901608743.

<sup>78</sup> *Women and Work*, 19 June 1875, Issue 55, p. 4, GD:DX1900504241.

<sup>79</sup> *The Morning Post*, 28 May 1870, Issue 30,100, p. 7, GD:R3213151064.

<sup>80</sup> A. Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (Glasgow, 1976), pp. 869-870.

were to replace hand-sewing by women. ‘The Sewing-Machine’, issued by the children’s religious periodical *CC*, claimed that ‘our little girls must learn to use the needle, and hem, and sew, and make button-holes, in spite of sewing machines; for I have not heard whether sewing machines can darn or patch, or do all the work that is to be done’.<sup>81</sup> This suggests not only that a machine could not perform all kinds of needlework, and so that schools should maintain sewing lessons, but also that, for conservative Victorians, hand-sewing was a constructor of girls’ morality, domesticity and femininity in mediating a patriarchal society.<sup>82</sup> Likewise, a cartoon from *Punch* in 1858 (Figure 4-15) describes a scene in which ‘old Mr Wiggles tries his new sewing machine, and finds his garments throw out buttons in a very indiscriminate manner’.<sup>83</sup> This description makes it clear that no sewing machine could fix buttons, and that without sewing skills no one could work on a machine properly. Sewing was regarded as a woman’s duty, and so men were not expected to cross the gender boundary to do domestic sewing, despite the fact that male tailors continued to play their role in the market.

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Fig. 4-15 The Sewing Machine with Mr Wiggles, *Punch*, 10 January 1857, p. 20, GD:DX1901547665.

<sup>81</sup> *CC*, 1 July 1865, Issue 247, p. 194, GD:DX1901662231.

<sup>82</sup> ‘The early sewing machines were good only for sewing flat seams and for sewing on trimmings. Machines for the bind stitching of hems, for buttonholing and for sewing on buttons were not developed until towards the end of the nineteenth century’. A. Forty, *Objects of Desire: Design and Society 1750-1980* (1986), p. 53.

<sup>83</sup> *Punch*, 10 January 1857, p. 20, GD:DX1901547665.



Furthermore, many articles claimed that a woman who practised hand-sewing maintained the gender hierarchy. In 1859, *Punch* claimed that ‘the very best Sewing Machine a man can have is a Wife’, and in 1861 *WF* declared that ‘there is a sewing machine that we can recommend. It is a wife’.<sup>84</sup> Both articles concluded that ‘no gentleman’s establishment is complete without one of these Sewing Machines in the house’. Such quotes perhaps imply that hand-sewing objects produced by a wife represented her sincerity to her husband, whereas machine-sewing was a form of cheating. A cartoon from *Punch* (1866), entitled ‘the Sewing-Machine’ (Figure 4-16), on the other hand, showed a male draper declaring that a sewing machine was ‘a most wonderful invention’, and that ‘it really executes the work so efficiently and quickly’, but his concern was that ‘there’s nothing left for the ladies to do now but to improve their intellects’.<sup>85</sup> This text reveals that, when women did not have sewing to occupy them, too, they might be tempted to educate themselves, which could be a threat to men. In 1870, *Punch* extolled “a ‘noiseless sewing machine’ – a good wife”, suggesting that a good wife was not only voiceless but also able to sew, and so an ideal woman did not need to have a sewing machine.<sup>86</sup>

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Fig. 4-16 ‘The Sewing-Machine’, *Punch*, 14 May 1870, p. 192, GD:DX1901562119.

<sup>84</sup> ‘The Best Sewing-Machine’, *Punch*, 5 March 1859, p. 91, GD:DX1901551228; ‘An Undeniably Lovely Sewing Machine’, *WF*, 1 December 1861, Issue 456, GD:DX1902138889.

<sup>85</sup> ‘The Sewing-Machine’, *Punch*, 3 March 1866, p. 46, GD:DX 1901571871.

<sup>86</sup> *Punch*, 14 May 1870, p.192. GD:DX1901562119.

Turning to practical functions, although domestic sewing machines were often advertised as being simple, easy and reliable for any lady or child to sew efficiently, it was difficult to run the machines properly unless the user had some sewing skills. According to the column 'The Englishwoman's Exchange', in *EDM* (1870), many women did in fact exchange their sewing machines. One reader, 'Luisa', wrote that she had two sewing machines 'to dispose of equal to new, having been very little used' suggesting that sewing machines were as not easy to use as the advertisements claimed, given that 'Luisa' had hardly used them.<sup>87</sup> In the enquiries published by *LT* in 1872, the reader 'Perplexity' described how her friend had told her that she had to be in a very good temper and to have a great deal of patience when using a machine. She was an impatient person, though, and hoped that ladies would honestly recommend the best sewing machine to use, which suggests that some middle-class women did pay attention to the functions of a sewing machine.<sup>88</sup> For this reason, a lot of readers and even editors of magazines asked for recommendations from ladies with experience working with machines as regards help in choosing a 'useful' machine. Some sewing machine companies offered a trial period to attract more customers. The vendors of the Florence sewing machine, for instance, declared that 'if any purchaser of the Florence is dissatisfied after a three months' trial, we will give in exchange any sewing machine of similar value known to the trade'.<sup>89</sup>

From the evidence of the periodicals, it seems that many readers had experience of working on a sewing machine. According to my survey of female Legacy Duty papers held in the NA between 1850 and 1875, however, only one inventory, belonging to the dressmaker Hannah Faulkner (1834-63), lists a sewing machine.<sup>90</sup> It is possible that valuable sewing machines were passed on to the next generation or to others, as women were less likely to use them in later stages of life, and elderly women

<sup>87</sup> *EDM*, 1 August 1870, Issue 68/5, p. 103, GD:DX1901422393.

<sup>88</sup> *LT*, 1 August 1872, p. 112, GD:DX1902009595.

<sup>89</sup> *LF*, 1 August 1867, Issue 251, p. 64, GD:DX1901607663.

<sup>90</sup> NA:IR19/121/820, 1861 *English Census*,

<<http://search.ancestry.co.uk/iexec?htx=view&r=5538&dbid=Hannah&gsln=Faulkner%20&h=2271152>> [accessed 29 March 2012] In Britain, sales of sewing machines in the 1850s and 1860s were quite low. According to data on the value of American-manufactured sewing machines imported into Britain, they 'had reached around 7,500 per annum by 1865, growing to perhaps 100,000 by 1870'. Godley, 'UK Clothing Industry', p. 56. Until the mid-1870s 'a good half or more of the machines sold to domestic customers went to poorer households, where women used them to boost family incomes by the taking in sewing on a freelance basis or by working at home for firms manufacturing ready-made clothes'. Cited in Snodin and Styles, *Design*, p. 452; A. Godley, 'Homeworking and the Sewing Machines in the British Clothing Industry, 1850-1905', in Burman (ed.), *Sewing*, pp. 255-268(p. 261).

might be less inclined to adopt new technologies. Sewing machines are also seldom mentioned or listed in the collections of B&I, and it is possible that periodicals fabricated readers' letters to promote sewing machines.

To sum up, although advertisers insisted that sewing machines brought great pleasure to middle-class homes, not all mid-Victorians accepted machine-sewing, because a machine was seen as capable of destroying feminine virtues, or improving women's intellect, which threatened the gender hierarchy.

### **Sewing, Personal Expression and Relationships**

The development of sewing machines and paper patterns facilitated home dressmaking in middle-class families. By studying women's letters as well as the enquiries published by periodicals, this section explores the potential reasons why middle-class women sewed and who they sewed for, with a view to understanding the multiple meanings of sewing in the mid-Victorian period. For middle-class women themselves, home sewing was not just a domestic virtue and duty, prescribed in Victorian literature, but also a very real means of showing their wifely and maternal love, of relaxing, of expressing their personal feelings and of building up their real-life relationships.

Fundamentally, sewing for middle-class women was undertaken in performance of their domestic role. On 24 May 1851, the English novelist Charlotte Brontë wrote a letter to her lifelong friend Ellen Nussey (1817-97), apologising:

I really can no more come to Brookroyd before I go to London than I can fly -- I have lots of sewing to do -- as well as 'houshold' matters to arrange before I leave -- as they will clean &c. in my absence.<sup>91</sup>

Though it is not clear why Charlotte had so much sewing to do at that moment, needlework and housework constituted the key duties which she had to complete before she left. Charlotte's mother had died in 1821, and her father was an Irish Anglican clergyman. Such needlework was therefore probably for her father, brothers or other members of her family, or even for church activities, although she was already a successful writer at the time. Thus, to be a 'respectable' daughter, wife or mother, a woman had to perform her share of household tasks. In 1861, *Punch* published an article called 'A Sensible Exchange':

'Why, my dear Mrs Smith, what ever have you done with your Piano?' 'Oh! Mr Smith insisted upon my disposing of it, and buying instead a Sewing machine for each of the girls. He says they would be much useful, and would

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<sup>91</sup> 'Houshold' in original. M. Smith (ed.), *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë: with a Selection of Letters by Family and Friends, Vol. 2: 1848-51* (Oxford, 2000), p. 621, B&I:S7222-D396.

make much less noise'.<sup>92</sup>

This conversation suggests that, from the viewpoint of a father, a sewing machine could be more useful than a piano, even if a well-educated lady was perhaps expected to be able to play the piano as well as to sew.<sup>93</sup> Also, Mrs Smith's musical skills were limited, as she made 'noise' rather than melody. She had not practised the piano for a while, so Mr Smith asked her to dispose of it, and instead to buy sewing machines for his daughters. Nevertheless, this conversation suggests that some women may, like Mrs Smith, have preferred to have a piano rather than a sewing machine.

Home sewing also signified a woman as a good housekeeper with the virtue of thrift.<sup>94</sup> *The Ladies' Hand-Book* and *A New, Simple, and Complete Method of Dressmaking* made it clear that clothing was an important item in family expenditure, especially if there were a number of females in the family. The cost of dressmaking was at least one and a half times more than that of the material itself.<sup>95</sup> Debenham & Freebody's *New Fashion Book* of October 1870, for example, noted that making a plain dress cost 10s. 6d., while making the bodice of an evening dress cost 12s. 6d.<sup>96</sup> *How to Make a Dress*, on the other hand, argued that every mother and daughter had to practise economy, and *The Ladies' Book of Needle Work* stated that with good sewing skills a woman could make every object in her household economically, and decorate her house beautifully with her own hands.<sup>97</sup> To return to the letter which started this chapter, and in tribute to the lady's ingenuity and thrift, Mrs Carlyle used her 'superfluous' black silk scarf for her house jacket.<sup>98</sup>

Altering old dresses to convert them into new ones saved expenditure on material, and was also an outlet for creativity. In one of the enquiries from *Myra's* in 1875, 'Rosina' wrote:

I have two dresses, quite good, not in the least soiled; one is a French merino (dark brown), and the other a pale brown crepe cloth. There is plenty of material in them, both having long tunics, and made two years ago. Could I not make the two into one? The colours harmonise well. And will you kindly help me with a pattern, not too difficult, as I have never done any dressmaking

<sup>92</sup> 'A Sensible Exchange', *Punch*, 30 November 1861, p. 222, GD:DX1901555700.

<sup>93</sup> *Good Society*, p. 230. On playing the piano, see Chapter 2, p. 95; on pianos in photography, see Chapter 3, p. 138.

<sup>94</sup> It was also a way for women to earn income or pin money, though I choose not to discuss this issue here, because once a middle-class woman sewed for money, her social class identity was destroyed.

<sup>95</sup> *The Ladies' Hand-Book*, p. vii; T. Whiteley, *A New, Simple, and Complete Method of Dressmaking, in All its Branches* (Manchester, 1855), p. iii.

<sup>96</sup> Adburgham, *Shops*, pp. 134-135.

<sup>97</sup> Mrs A. Adams, *How to Make A Dress; or A Help to Those Who Wish to Help Themselves* (1853), p. vi; Georgens, *Needle*, p. 1.

<sup>98</sup> Froude (ed.), *Carlyle, Vol. 2*, p. 155, B&I:S4445-D070.

before?

The editor replied to 'Rosina' that she could make a 'pretty' dress from her two old dresses. The dark brown merino skirt was trimmed with merino flounces, with a bouillon of a pale brown crepe cloth and a merino heading, and a narrower merino flounce and trimming repeated in graduated sizes. The crepe cloth made a *tablier* tunic and a jacket bodice without sleeves, trimmed with dark brown bias bands and crepe cordings, with dark merino sleeves finished with crepe cuffs. The dark merino mantle was finished with ruches of crepe.<sup>99</sup> It is clear that some middle-class women were keen to use their limited materials or old dresses to create a new desirable new item, whether they liked to sew or had the ability to do so. Many sewing instructions and articles also reminded readers that they should not try to make a dress by themselves unless they had sufficient sewing skills, such as how to cut out, cord and finish neatly, as otherwise it would be a waste of materials, money and time. In 1871, *Our Young Folks Weekly Budget* (1871-91), for example, reported that it was quite easy for amateurs to draw the wrong patterns, or to cut two identical sides for sleeves, and that if that happened, they would not then be able to complete the dress.<sup>100</sup>

For some middle-class women, sewing was indeed a way to represent their morality. In the letter from Octavia Hill to her sisters in 1859, the author claimed that 'I greatly fear I'm growing idle, I never seem hard worked now, and I never seem to do needlework or anything'.<sup>101</sup> When writing this letter, Octavia had already been ill for a while, and yet she worried that without sewing she was failing to maintain her female virtues, and thus becoming in some way immoral. This letter also proves that there was no reason why a literary woman or a social reformer should not do needlework.

Sewing was also a means of relaxation. In an article published by *LN* in 1855, the English writer and Anglican cleric Sydney Smith (1771-1845) expressed his feelings about sewing:

I wish I could sew. I believe one reason why women are so much more cheerful generally than men is, because they can work, and vary more their employments. Lady - used to teach her sons carpet work. All men ought to learn to sew.<sup>102</sup>

<sup>99</sup> 'Dress Alternation and Economies', *Myra's*, 1 February 1875, Issue 1, p. 11, GD:DX1900859378.

<sup>100</sup> *Our Young Folks Weekly Budget*, 13 May 1871, Issue 20, p. 155, GD: DX1901152148.

<sup>101</sup> Hill, *Life*, p. 129, B&I:S7466-D101.

<sup>102</sup> 'Sydney Smith on Sewing', *LN*, 22 September 1855, Issue 456, p. 180, GD:DX1900479185. In 1794, Smith started a Sunday school at Netheravon near Salisbury, and taught girls how to darn, knit and sew. From 1804 to 1806, he lectured on moral philosophy at the Royal Institute, and later devoted himself to female education.

From his viewpoint, sewing combined utility with pleasure and instruction with entertainment, with the result that sewing made women ‘more cheerful than men’. For this reason, he wished all men could learn how to sew. A letter from Mrs Carlyle to Mrs Russell on 20 October 1862 described the trouble she had had managing three servants in her household. At the end of the letter, she mentions that:

there is an excellent Italian proverb, ‘The person who considers everything will never decide on anything!’ [...] That I shall have to fetch the books, and do the sewing myself will perhaps – ‘keep the devil from my elbow’.<sup>103</sup>

This letter suggests that for Mrs Carlyle, sewing, like reading books, relieved her stress and refreshed her mind, which might then help her to manage the servants’ housework. She was perhaps resigned to doing some of her servants’ work herself, such as the sewing, but was looking on the bright side, saying that the devil made work for idle hands.

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Fig. 4-17 ‘Domestic Economy’, *Punch*, 31 August 1867, p. 90, GD:DX1901558436.

Home sewing symbolised a woman’s care and love for her family, relatives, friends and wider community. In Mrs Carlyle’s letter of 28 January 1860, she expresses her decision not to sew for the next few months, with the exception of her husband’s buttons.<sup>104</sup> Sewing in such a case was connected to a wife’s respect, admiration and love rather than to domestic duty because, after all, in 1860 Mrs Carlyle had servants to

<sup>103</sup> Froude (ed.), *Carlyle*, Vol. 2, p. 392, B&I:S4445-D113.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155, B&I:S4445-D070.



help her to do the housework, and she could have delegated the task to a servant. ‘Good’ homemade objects established a woman’s authority in household management, but those that were in poor taste could damage the reputation of the family. A cartoon from *Punch* (1873), entitled ‘Domestic Economy’ (Figure 4-17), for example, satirised the fact that a sewing machine helped the amateur Mrs Toddles, whose surname might signify her infantile sewing skills, to make her husband a ‘neat suit’.<sup>105</sup> Though a men’s shirt could be made at home, other items of male clothing were considered to be professional work.<sup>106</sup> A suit combining a vertically-striped shirt with a pair of horizontally-striped trousers could only bring ill fame to her husband.

Furthermore, sewing for children was considered to be an expression of maternal love. Although women’s magazines regularly provided their readers with paper patterns for children’s clothing, readers who were also mothers kept sending the magazines enquiries asking for their favourite patterns to sew for their children.<sup>107</sup> Taking readers’ enquiries published in ‘the Englishwoman’s Conversazione’ by *EDM* as an example, ‘Anne’ asked for the embroidery patterns for a baby’s robe,<sup>108</sup> and in another case ‘Tiny’ expressed the hope that some patterns for baby’s clothes for infants aged between six and eighteen months could be provided in the next issue.<sup>109</sup> As compared with making her own dresses, it was easier for a mother to make an infant’s wraps, a baby’s pinafore or a child’s shirt and frock, because these were not required to fit well, and could be made from offcuts or from her own old dresses.<sup>110</sup> Such little things could be made of used materials, and so a mother could save money for the household, or even for buying herself a new dress. Whether or not a mother’s sewing came naturally, sewing for children was the symbol of a ‘good’ mother. The article ‘The Work-Table’, written by Mademoiselle Roche, claimed that a baby’s Christmas cap, which was the object ‘for presentation to the new heir to immortality’, was a lovely gift when prepared by a sister’s or aunt’s own hands, because it brought a child luck, particularly in a period of high infant mortality.<sup>111</sup> Sewing was therefore a way to develop a woman’s relationship with her kin.

<sup>105</sup> ‘Domestic Economy’, *Punch*, 31 August 1867, p. 90, GD:DX1901558436.

<sup>106</sup> B. Burman, ‘Introduction’, in idem (ed.), *Sewing*, pp. 1-20(p. 13).

<sup>107</sup> As well as dressmaking patterns, ladies’ magazines offered readers needlework patterns, such as Berlin work, crochet, embroidery and lacework, for making babies’, infants’ or children’s caps, as well as stockings and boots. Though these upper-class ladies could afford tailor-made items for their children, they chose to make them with their own hands in order to show their motherly affection.

<sup>108</sup> *EDM*, 1 February 1861, Issue 11, p. 288, GD:DX1901418558.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 January 1870, Issue 61, p. 62, GD:DX1901422196.

<sup>110</sup> ‘Hints on Dress-Making’, *LT*, 1 May 1859, p. 152, GD:DX1901524163.

<sup>111</sup> *EDM*, [Date Unknown], Issue 9, p. 289, GD:DX1901533312.

Home sewing also had the potential to make mother-daughter relationships close. In the enquiry published in *EDM* on 1 June 1868, 'E. S.' wrote that she was good at hand-dressmaking, and wanted a 'quiet style' of black silk jacket pattern for a girl aged 15 or 16, commenting at the same time that the magazine's patterns were excellent, especially as regards baby clothes.<sup>112</sup> This probably implies that 'E. S.' had sewed for her girl since she was a little baby, and so she knew that patterns of baby clothes issued by *EDM* were 'excellent'. In this case, 'E. S.' passed not only her femininity but also a sense of beauty on to her girl, though it is possible that 'E. S.' was simply very interested in dressmaking, and used several patterns. Another reader, 'Blanche', wrote that each month she and her daughters looked forward to receiving the latest *EDM*, with a 'hearty welcome'. They had a Jackson's hand-sewing machine that helped them to do all their plain sewing, as well as to make their dresses. Because of the magazine's patterns, they could do all their work at home, and their dresses looked just as if a dressmaker had made them. One of her daughters asked for a cut-out paper pattern for a young lady's dress, while the other wanted a 'pretty tatting pattern' for collars, antimacassars and chemisettes.<sup>113</sup> 'Blanche' and her daughters enjoyed making their own dresses, and they seemed to have a good relationship with each other, sharing their tastes in such a way that 'Blanche' knew what kinds of patterns her girls wanted. 'Blanche's' letter shows us that by using dressmaking patterns, some amateurs with sufficient sewing skills could make fashionable dresses, just as a tailor would. However, from 270 surviving female dresses that I consulted in England while writing this thesis, most of them were stitched by hand, and made by professionals. Compared with hand-stitching, the size and length of machine stitches were completely uniform. The stitching of professionals or skilled amateurs would be expected to be uniform, and to have no loose threads or puckering on either the outside or the inside of the dress. Due to the complexity of women's dress and sizing systems, mechanical stitching did not become well established for ready-made women's clothes until the 1920s. Homemade clothes, on the other hand, might not have served as people's best dresses and may have been altered again and again, and so they have rarely survived. Furthermore, most museums have always preferred to collect 'good design' or professionally-made clothes of 'extraordinary' quality.

Dressmaking was promoted as a hugely popular social activity among middle-class women. This enquiry, published in *EDM* in 1861, notes that:

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 June 1868, Issue 42, p. 324, GD:DX1901419241.

<sup>113</sup> 'The Englishwoman's Conversazione', *EDM*, 1 January 1873, Issue 97, p. 53, GD:DX1901420836.

Flora, Beatrice, and Lily Sophia are good enough to join in the arm-hole controversy, volunteering the following bona fide testimony to the correctness of our patterns: – ‘we are requested by our friends to acknowledge the correctness of the pattern of the dress with waistcoat for little boys which appeared in the *Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine* for June 1861. A relative of ours has had one made from the pattern and it fitted admirably; indeed, our little Frank looks quite charming in it. We are extremely surprised at the ingratitude of Sophia Anderson and her friends...’<sup>114</sup>

This text shows that women liked to share their paper patterns and discuss their sewing problems. Sophia Anderson and her friends complained that *EDM* had offered them incorrect patterns, with the result that they could not join the armhole of the little boy’s waistcoat.<sup>115</sup> However, with the same paper patterns, a relative of Flora, Beatrice and Lily Sophia successfully made an admirable waistcoat for their little Frank. This suggests that Sophia and her friends had drawn the wrong patterns and cut the wrong pieces of the waistcoat, and this was why they were unable to make it up. However, with sufficient sewing skills, a woman would never have to wear a torn dress or a pair of holed stockings, and could make a dress that fit her well, because neither tailor nor dressmaker could understand a woman’s figure better than she herself could: she could make herself appear quite as elegant as this sewing queen (Figure 4-18), whose hand holds some thread, and each of her pockets is filled with a pack of needles: her sash is tied with yarn, her belt holds scissors and her crown is a pin cushion.<sup>116</sup> Likewise, a woman could choose her favourite materials to create her own dress, express her personal tastes, and shape her personal interpretation of fashion.<sup>117</sup> On the other hand, the body of the woman is subsumed by sewing, suggesting that a Victorian woman was defined by her needlework.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 August 1861, Issue 16, p. 216, GD:DX1901418634.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 July 1861, Issue 15, p. 168, GD:DX1901418618.

<sup>116</sup> ‘Work-Table Companion’, *EDM*, 1 January 1864, Issue 54, GD:DX1901417992.

<sup>117</sup> Tickell (ed.), *Gentlewomen*, p. 19.

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Fig. 4-18 'The Work-Table Companion', *EDM*, 1 October 1864, Issue 54, GD:DX1901417992.

Victorian women used sewing to cement their social networks. On 13 July 1854, Mrs Carlyle wrote a letter to Mrs Russell, in which she mentions that:

I began to make a cap for old Mary; but it is impossible to get on with sewing at this season; so you must give her a pound of tea from me instead. Do you know I am not sure to this moment that she ever got the woollen thing I sent her through Mrs Aitken. Mrs Aitken forgot it, I know, and it was long after she said she had sent it to you by the carrier.<sup>118</sup>

Making a cap was Mrs Carlyle's priority, representing her care for 'old Mary', though in the end she gave her a pound of tea instead.<sup>119</sup> Her letter suggests that during the summertime some middle-class women preferred attending outdoor activities to sewing at home, though they did experience a sense of guilt for not sewing. In another letter, Mrs Carlyle told Mrs Russell that if she liked her new jacket she could send her the paper patterns.<sup>120</sup> Sharing paper patterns with friends was a way to help women to save on their limited clothing budgets, and also to share their tastes. In the mid-Victorian period, sewing machines and dressmaking handbooks, as well as dressmaking patterns, were recommended as a desirable Christmas present or New Year's gift for women (Figures 4-19 & 20). According to the advertisements of Oliver Co., "the most useful

<sup>118</sup> Froude (ed.), *Carlyle*, Vol. 2, pp. 29-30, B&I:S4445-D012.

<sup>119</sup> On the importance of caps for elderly women, see Chapter 1, pp. 62-63.

<sup>120</sup> Froude (ed.), *Carlyle*, Vol. 2, p. 155, B&I:S4445-D070.

Christmas present is the ‘Fairy’ hand sewing machine (£2.12s.6d)”.<sup>121</sup> This could be explained by the fact that home sewing had become very popular, and most women tended to follow fashion and tried to be fashionable in order to earn the approval of their social group. *The Gift*, by Marcel Mauss, shows that sending a gift implied a process in which the receiver then reciprocates in order to repay the debts, and Natalie Zemon Davis also points out that a ‘gift register’ or ‘gift mode’ was an essential form of human relationship, mediated by commercial exchange. These indicate that the exchange of sewing accessories was a social tool for reinforcing Victorian female friendship.<sup>122</sup>

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Fig. 4-19 The Dressmaking Handbook for A Christmas Present, *LN*, 22 December 1855, Issue 469, p. 392, GD:DX1900479889.

Fig. 4-20 The Sewing-Machine for A Christmas Present, *The Illustrated London News* (1842-1971) (hereafter *ILN*), 16 December 1865, Issue 1347, p. 586, GD:HN3100068880.

Sewing for charities showed middle-class women’s kindness and also helped them to earn reputation and respectability. This idea may have originated in the Bible, where the virtuous woman Dorcas sewed for the poor.<sup>123</sup> A letter from Octavia Hill to Gertrude Hill Lewes (1862) describes how she opened a school in her house at 14 Nottingham Place:

as to needlework, it is one of my great desires to teach it to those children thoroughly, as well as all habits of neatness, punctuality, self-reliance, and such practical power and forethought as will make them helpful in their homes. I think they may be taught to delight in them.<sup>124</sup>

In this letter, Octavia expresses the hope that sewing could help poor girls to make

<sup>121</sup> *JB*, 21 December 1867, Issue 2,454, p. 874, GD:DX1900547400.

<sup>122</sup> Mauss, *The Gift*; N. Z. Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France* (Oxford, 2000), esp. Introduction, pp. 3-16. On photographs as gifts, see Chapter 3, pp. 123-124.

<sup>123</sup> Over the centuries, charities known as Dorcas societies had been set up to provide clothing and fulfil other physical needs for the poor around the world. On Dorcas or Dorcasian societies, see Styles, *Dress*, pp. 251-252; Richmond and Rose (eds.), *Clothing*, Vol. 3, p. 211-213; idem, *Finery*, pp. 204, 207-212.

<sup>124</sup> Hill, *Life*, p. 200, B&I:S7466-D161.

money for a living, and that they could also enjoy doing needlework.<sup>125</sup> In *In Memoriam*, meanwhile, Alice Mary Moore Wade remembers that:

as a child, she had disliked needle-work very much; but when she took it up for the poor, and to aid in mission work, she not only did it gladly, but beautifully, and every spare moment was usefully employed in this way, so that it was astonishing how much she accomplished.<sup>126</sup>

Once Alice realised that sewing could support the poor, she started to enjoy doing needlework. This motivation was different from that suggested by Democritus Machiavel Brown in his book *Young-Ladyism*, where he describes the motivations of a lady who had learnt how to make collars, which could be bought so cheaply: ‘the intense and exciting pleasure of the employment itself, and the feeling of proper and gratified pride with which one lady hears the compliments of another on her own work’.<sup>127</sup> However, both texts are similar in considering that sewing brought women self-satisfaction and happiness. In short, home sewing helped middle-class women to represent not only their morality and the virtues of thrift, maternity and domesticity, but also their fashionableness, sociability and charity.

## Conclusion

Analysis of both mid-Victorian children’s periodicals and women’s magazines shows that depictions of sewing were used to construct middle-class women’s morality and domesticity. Sewing, for little girls implied the process of acquiring self-discipline, and was a way for them to show their independence. Passing a sewing box on to a daughter also signified that a virtuous mother sought to pass on womanhood to the next generation: sewing shored up women’s roles in a male-dominated society. However, middle-class girls could not learn to sew skilfully in school, and so they might not be able to apply small diagrams of clothes. With the development of real-size paper patterns and step-by-step sewing instructions, they could sew fashionable clothes by themselves easily. The focus thereby shifted from sewing to dressmaking, which was promoted as a fashionable activity to maintain women’s outer appearance. It seems that even upper or upper middle-class women were keen to make their own clothes,

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<sup>125</sup> Vivienne Richmond argues that the making of a pair of calico drawers, decorated with tucks and *broderie anglaise* represented the working-class young woman, Eliza Kenniff’s self-adornment and esteem. V. Richmond, ‘Stitching the Self: Eliza Kenniff’s Drawers and the Materialization of Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century London’, in Goggin and Tobin (eds.), *Women and Things*, pp. 43-54.

<sup>126</sup> ‘Front Matter’, in Moore (ed.), *In Memoriam*, B&I:S5198-D001.

<sup>127</sup> James McGrigor Allan (pseudonym Democritus Machiavel Brown c. 1828-1916), *Young-Ladyism; A Handbook on the Education, Accomplishments, Duties, Dress, and Deportment of the Upper Ten Thousand* (1859), p. 55.



attending expensive dressmaking lessons.

Studying the advertisements of sewing machines reveals the traditional values and modern consumer culture of mid-nineteenth England, and also offers a sense for how advertisers expected people to react. Given the diversity of potential customers, sewing machine advertisers invented different images and statements to persuade different categories of mid-Victorians to buy their products. A thrifty clergyman's daughter working on her machine was associated with traditional values, while those machines recommended by the gentry or by fashionable ladies were advertised as the trappings of a highly comfortable and fashionable life. Sewing machines could not only offer women aspiration and authority, but could also function as a timesaver through which a woman could attain a truly modern lifestyle. A caring husband would purchase a machine to maintain his wife's happiness and health, and to show his role as the breadwinner as well as his consideration and appreciation of domesticity. Nevertheless, sewing machines also provoked anxiety for both sexes because some believed that women would lose their morality and gender identity, whereas others believed that if relieved of domestic drudgery women would have time to educate themselves, which could be a threat to men.

To focus on the sewing experiences of the middle class themselves, Mrs Jane Carlyle altered her 'superfluous' scarf to create a house jacket, despite disliking sewing, thus embodying the virtue of thrift. She was also keen to sew buttons for her husband, to sew a cap for old Mary, and to give her jacket pattern to Mrs Russell. This suggests that sewing or exchanging sewing accessories represented Jane's care and love for her family and friends, and cemented her social networks. The successful novelist Charlotte Brontë could not visit Brookroyd because she had to finish her household sewing, while the social reformer Octavia Hill felt guilty if she did not do any sewing even when she was sick. She taught the poor to sew with a belief that sewing was not just for making money, but also for relaxation. Alice Mary Moore Wade disliked needlework, but she felt much happier and did it beautifully when she came to realise that needlework helped the poor. Sewing for charity maintained a family's reputation, and gave women pride in themselves.

Home sewing thus represented the ideology of gender identity as well as being a fashionable activity and a mode of expression for middle-class women, and the next chapter will look what type of items of clothing helped to fashion the identities of middle-class women.

## Chapter 5

### A Middle-Class Woman's Wardrobe: Account Books, Dress Records and Inventories

On 23 April 1851, Charlotte Brontë wrote this letter to her friend Ellen Nussey:

I had taken one of the Black Lace Mantles -- but when I came to try it with the Black Satin dress, with which I should chiefly want to wear it, I found the effect was far from good -- the beauty of the lace was lost and it looked somewhat brown and rusty. Thereupon I wrote to Mr Stocks requesting him to change it for a white mantle of the same price -- he was extremely courteous and sent to London for one which I have got this morning. The price is less -- being but <one> 1£ 14s. It is pretty -- neat and light -- looks well on black -- and upon reasoning the matter over, I came to the philosophic conclusion that it would be no shame for a person of my means to wear a cheaper thing -- so I think I shall take it: and if you ever see it -- and call it 'trumpery' so much the worse...<sup>1</sup>

Trying to match her black satin dress with one of her black lace mantles, Charlotte found that the lace of her mantle looked tasteless, and she therefore requested that it be altered to white. Upon receiving the new version of the mantle, Charlotte was satisfied with the quality and cost of the work, claiming that a woman with good taste in dress could dress elegantly even if her dress was an inexpensive one. This letter proves that a dress could be altered over the passage of time without any reduction in quality, and demonstrates how a respectable middle-class woman might use her limited clothing budget to keep up a decent appearance.

Since the 1980s, the history of consumption has been explored through multidisciplinary approaches. Pierre Bourdieu declared that an individual's consumption practices embody his or her class identity,<sup>2</sup> and *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture* by Lorna Weatherill concludes, after the study of three thousand probate inventories in early modern England, that the patterns of consumption of the middling sort were quite different from those of the gentry. The more professional middling sorts, for example, owned more pictures than the gentry, and tradesmen owed more newly-purchased items.<sup>3</sup> *The Gentleman's Daughter* by Amanda Vickery argues that the women of the gentry of the Georgian era were careful to balance fashion with other factors such as durability when they came to make their purchases.<sup>4</sup> *The Hidden*

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<sup>1</sup> Smith (ed.), *Brontë, Vol. 2*, p. 608, B&I:S7222-D387. "'Mantles' rather than 'cloaks' would be the draper's term for these fashionable shawl-like garments. They were loose and sleeveless, but more gathered into the neck than shawls". *Ibid.* This letter also reveals that the middle-aged women Ellen (34) and Charlotte (35) followed contemporary fashion, wearing a 'mantle' instead of a 'cloak'.

<sup>2</sup> P. Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 1-2, 12.

<sup>3</sup> Weatherill, *Consumer*, p. 168.

<sup>4</sup> Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, esp. ch. 5, pp. 161-194.

*Consumer* (1999) by Christopher Breward argues, on the other hand, that urban upper and middle-class men played an active part in fashion consumption, fashioning their own male identity in mid-nineteenth and early twentieth-century England.<sup>5</sup> Erika Rappaport also notes that middle-class women shopped for pleasure, and by doing so helped to construct the urban culture of the late Victorian and Edwardian periods.<sup>6</sup> Despite all of this literature, though, it has remained unclear exactly what sort of clothing items mid-Victorian middle-class women desired and why, as well as what they actually bought and how they fashioned their identity.

This chapter argues that symbolic dress consumption was used by middle-class women to construct and maintain their gender, class and identity. The first section of the chapter discusses how contemporary advice books and articles in women's magazines provided instruction to an ideal middle-class woman in how to manage her dress expenses according to her social status, and examines how much money middle-class women actually spent on dress and what sort of clothes they generally bought. This has been achieved by studying the account books and dress vouchers of three individual women: Mrs Marianne Grove Price (1805-68), Mrs Mary Baker (1815-1905) and Mrs Mary Ann Spring (1803-78). Their account books and clothing bills are held at the GA, along with two notebooks, one belonging to an unknown tailor (1864-66, from the GA) and the other to the dressmaker of Miss Clarke (1873-75, from the SHC). This thesis makes no claim that the cases selected are representative of the dress consumption of all middle-class women, but they appeared to be the best available from a national survey, and provide evidence of the consumption of middle-class women of differing social categories, incomes and occupations.<sup>7</sup>

The second section of the chapter aims to demonstrate how, leaving aside the issues of social norms, morality and etiquette, middle-class women's dress actually reflected their economic situation in many ways. It does this by studying the clothing inventories of 26 women who died between 1850 and 1875 in Central and Southern England, using Legacy Duty papers (IR19-95 to IR19-149) found in the records of the Boards of Stamps, Taxes, Excise and the Inland Revenue, which are held in the NA at Kew. It is important to emphasise that very few nineteenth-century clothing inventories

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<sup>5</sup> Breward, *Hidden Consumer*.

<sup>6</sup> E. Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton, NJ, 2000), p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Though these five case studies lack details of biographical information and income, they remain informative. The economic historian Pat Hudson argues that 'an independent random sample' is the most representative, but most studies of historical inventories are based on the samples that survive in archives. P. Hudson, *History by Numbers: An Introduction to Quantitative Approaches* (2000), p. 170.

have survived, particularly because the practice of making probate inventories had largely died out since the late eighteenth century. The difficulties posed by the absence of probate inventories have been repeatedly noted by historians of the Victorian domestic interior.<sup>8</sup> It is indeed impossible to carry out a quantitative analysis of large-scale data sets such as Weatherill's study of early modern consumer behaviour in England, but these 26 female clothing inventories do represent a rare and significant source for the study of mid-Victorian Englishwomen's consumer behaviour.<sup>9</sup>

### **Clothes in Account Books and Dress Records**

This section investigates how much money a typical middle-class woman could spend on dress, and what sort of clothes middle-class women actually bought to fashion their identities.<sup>10</sup> On 10 May 1851, another letter from Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey went as follows:

do you know that I was in Leeds on the very same day with you -- last Wednesday? I had thought of telling you when I was going -- and having your help and company in buying a bonnet &c. but then I reflected this would be merely making a selfish use of you -- so I determined to manage or mismanage the matter alone -- I went to Hunt & Hall's for the bonnet -- and got one which seemed grave and quiet there amongst all the splendours -- but now it looks infinitely too gay with its pink lining -- I saw some beautiful silks of pale sweet colours but had not the spirit or the means to launch out at the rate of 5s. per y[ar]d and went and bought a black silk at 3s. after all -- I rather regret this -- because Papa says he would have lent me a sovereign if he had known. 'I believe if you had been there you would have forced me to get into debt'.<sup>11</sup>

This letter shows that for Charlotte, financial management, which played a key role in dress consumption, was an important factor in fashioning female domesticity. She chose to buy the cheaper black silk, but then came to regret her decision and wished that her friend had gone shopping with her.<sup>12</sup> By shopping together, they could have shared opinions and thus prevented Charlotte from making a wrong decision. Especially at a time when fashions were rapidly changing, women might not feel secure about their own tastes, and female companions could help to reduce the anxiety involved in the decision-making process.

<sup>8</sup> Ponsonby, *Interiors*, pp. 5-6; Morris, *Property*, p. 49.

<sup>9</sup> Weatherill, *Consumer*.

<sup>10</sup> On men buying clothing appropriate to their status, see Breward, *Hidden Consumer*, esp. ch. 3, pp. 54-99.

<sup>11</sup> Smith (ed.), *Brontë*, Vol. 2, p. 613, B&I:S7222-D390.

<sup>12</sup> 'If the wearer does not possess a good eye for colour she should never rely on her own judgement'. *Etiquette and the Usages of Society*, p. 44. On women shopping in groups in the eighteenth century, see C. Walsh, 'Shops, Shopping, and the Art of Decision Making in Eighteenth-century England', in Styles and Vickery (eds.), *Gender*, pp. 151-178(p. 170).

Domestic economy was considered to be one of the duties of a 'good' woman.

In 1864, a reader of *EDM* who described herself as 'Anxious' claimed that:

one great essential to the practice of economy is regularity of payments and accounts in your table, in your dress, and in all other things, aim at propriety and neatness [...]. To go beyond your sphere either in dress or in the arrangement of your table indicates a greater fault than to be too much within it.<sup>13</sup>

A respectable middle-class woman had to be a careful shopper, using her limited clothing budget to maintain her class identification and demonstrating her authority in household management.<sup>14</sup> The Scottish author and reformer Samuel Smiles (1812-1904) stated in his book *Thrift* (1875) that:

no woman is justified in running into debt for a dress, without her husband's knowledge and consent. If she does so, she is clothing herself at the expense of the draper. This is one of the things that worry a man who is trying to keep his head above water; and it is often sufficient to turn his heart against his wife and her extravagances.<sup>15</sup>

Over-consumption ruined the reputation of the wife, especially when her husband had financial difficulties. Conversely, a prudent and economical wife would be praised. In *Little Women*, Margaret March loved luxury and good society, but in the end she learns to value simple things and becomes a 'good' housewife, in accordance with the social status of her husband, John Brooke.<sup>16</sup> The 'conspicuous consumption' of Thorstein Veblen was not a cultural value that was widely shared among the mid-Victorian middle classes.<sup>17</sup>

To prevent overspending by the end of the year, a thoughtful housekeeper would calculate and divide the household budget into several categories, with weekly estimates. *A Manual of Domestic Economy* (1856), by the English writer John Henry Walsh (1810-88), and the household manual *Cassell's* (1873) both declared that about one-half of a 'moderate' income had to be apportioned to the housekeeper, including the

<sup>13</sup> 'The Englishwoman's Conversazione', *EDM*, 1 August 1864, Issue 52, p. 192, GD:DX1901417973.

<sup>14</sup> On dress etiquette and social status, see Chapter 1, pp. 57-65. Democritus Machiavel Brown argued that 'if you [woman] have really no money to lay out, buy on long credit. Many things may have happened before the debt becomes due. The firm may have failed (no uncommon occurrence, owing to the long-credit system), or you may be married, and then your husband will be responsible'. Brown, *Young-Ladyism*, p. 32. However, a woman who had a lot of debts was regarded as a fallen woman or prostitute, one who indulged in material pleasures. She would rarely be able either to attract a gentleman or to escape her debts. Karen Harvey argues that, in eighteenth-century England, economy offered 'an attractive theory linking men's household management to the wider economic and political spheres'. K. Harvey, *The Little Republic: Masculinity and Domestic Authority in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2012), p. 43.

<sup>15</sup> S. Smiles, *Thrift* (1875), p. 241.

<sup>16</sup> Alcott, *Little Women*, <<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/alcott/lwtext.html>>[accessed 3 April 2012]

<sup>17</sup> T. Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study in the Evolution of Institutions* (New York, 1899).

expenses of coal, candles, gas charges and laundry. The other half was to be devoted as follows: one-eighth for rent, taxes and water rates; one-eighth for clothing of all descriptions, including dressmaking and milliner's bills and needlework (Table 5-1); one-eighth for wages, illness and fire and life insurance; one-eighth for parties, other amusements and incidentals, such as travelling expenses, the cost of carriages, cabs and horses, the purchase or repair of furniture, and personal expenses of the family.<sup>18</sup> Mrs Eliza Warren declared that, with a clothing budget of £15 a year, a woman's dress should be well made of inexpensive materials, but not overloaded with trimmings.<sup>19</sup> Her best dress, for example, was a plain, rich black silk dress, and her home and evening dress were made out of 'the exquisite, fine, soft, silky' black alpaca. Likewise, her bonnets were made of a simple, plain good-quality material, and were well-shaped. This implies that plainer clothes represented success for a female householder, and that adaptation was a top priority for lower-middle-class women.

Expenditure for an Income per Annum	Yearly Clothing Fee	Weekly Clothing Fee
£100	£12.10s.	4s.9 1/2d.
£200	£30	11s.6 1/2d.
£250	£31.5s.	12s.
£300	£45	17s.3 1/2d.
£400	£50. 18s.	19s.7 1/2d.
£500	£62. 10s.	£1.4s.
£1,000	£125	£2.2s.

**Table 5-1. Clothing Budgets for Different Family Incomes<sup>20</sup>**

To dress elegantly, but at the same time economically, women had to plan their shopping, and had to know how to store their clothes. *How to Dress on £15 a Year* by 'A Lady' (1873) provided women with guidance to solve the problem of dressing 'like a lady' on the 'modest' sum of £15, claiming that women should buy their clothing materials at the end of the summer and winter seasons.<sup>21</sup> In July, when the shops sold off their summer stock, women could make their purchases for the rest of the current year and for the following spring. Similarly, in January, they could buy for the following winter and the autumn. Women could therefore plan and clarify their needs

<sup>18</sup> J. H. Walsh, *A Manual of Domestic Economy* (1856), pp. 606-607; *Cassell's*, p. 2. Mrs Eliza Warren argued that a family possessing £200 a year could spend £40 on dress: £20 for the husband, £15 for the wife and £5 for the baby. Warren, *How I Managed*, p. 12. Compared with Walsh and *Cassell's*, Warren's £200 family had an extra £10 for the clothing budget, implying that the family would have to save £10 on other expenses. It is important to bear in mind that such clothing expenses were for the whole family, and not for one person alone.

<sup>19</sup> Warren, *How I Managed*, p. 86. Also see Chapter 1, n. 12, p. 44.

<sup>20</sup> Walsh, *Economy*, pp. 606-607; *Cassell's*, p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> This book, however, seemed to suggest that £20 a year would be sufficient to manage comfortably. On obsolete fabrics becoming cheaper, see Introduction, p. 16.



within a six-month period rather than engage in random shopping.<sup>22</sup> Women who followed the suggestions of 'A Lady' could buy more durable and valuable material and thus dress properly, though perhaps not fashionably. 'A Lady' also suggested that in September or October women had to carefully clean and dry their summer dresses 'before putting them away for the winter'. If stored improperly, clothes could be spoilt, and might then not be suitable for the following year.<sup>23</sup> Maintaining a decent appearance was not based solely on how much money a woman could spend, but also on how she kept her clothes.

£15 a year might allow woman to dress like a lady during the daytime, but it was not enough for a woman who attended evening parties to dress well. As Walsh commented, such women required at least £40 a year.<sup>24</sup> In 1873, the editor of *EDM*, on the other hand, argued that £30 would be a sufficient sum for a young woman to dress in a 'quiet' town. These suggest that the costs involved in making a dress and dress allowances for a middle-class woman could vary significantly in different areas, and that it also depended how many social events she had to attend.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, *Myra's* (1875) reminded her readers that women with a dress allowance of under £30 a year had to make their own dresses, and train their daughters 'in every kind and class of plain needlework, dressmaking, and dress-alterations'.<sup>26</sup> Having to economise on dress did not, however, mean that women could not follow the latest fashion if they were able to remodel and alter their dresses themselves.<sup>27</sup> Mrs Jane Carlyle, for example, had a clothing budget of £25 a year, and this could be one reason why she changed her 'superfluous' scarf for a household jacket, despite disliking sewing.<sup>28</sup>

This chapter will now move on to analyse three individual women's account books and dress vouchers, as well as the record books of a dressmaker and a tailor, with

<sup>22</sup> 'A Lady', *How to Dress on £15*, p. 14. To avoid heavy bills, *How to Dress Well* (1876) by 'Sylvia' noted that women who needed to keep up appearances were supposed to have £15 to spend on dresses, bonnets and mantles; £3 for boots and shoes; 20s. for eight pairs of gloves; 18d. for the cleaning of the lighter shades among the six pairs; and 30s. for keeping the stock of linen and lingerie in good repair. 'Sylvia', *How to Dress Well*, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> 'A Lady', *How to Dress on £15*, p. 17. Clothes could become discoloured or faded by light, be deformed by damp or damaged by moths when they contained starch or dirt. Furthermore, some fabrics could be permanently creased when left folded up. On storage, see Walkley and Foster, *Crinolines*, esp. ch. 11.

<sup>24</sup> Walsh, *Economy*, p. 340 'The annual cost of a gentleman's dress may be made to range from £10 to £50 and upwards', but less than £30 a year will not allow for morning and evening dress in good order, p. 341. A woman having a £40 annual clothing allowance means that her family annual income had to be at least £500 (See Table 5-1).

<sup>25</sup> 'The Englishwoman's Conversazione', *EDM*, 1 August 1871, Issue 80, p. 126, GD:DX1901422057.

<sup>26</sup> 'Myra's Answers', *Myra's*, 1 July 1875, Issue 6, p. 126, GD:DX1900859569.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 November 1875, Issue 10, p. 222, GD:DX1900859776.

<sup>28</sup> J. Burnett, *A History of the Cost of Living* (Hamondsworth, 1969), p. 236. Also, see Chapter 4, p. 171.

a view to exploring whether Victorian women did in fact follow advice manuals to manage their budget and construct their identity. It is true that Vickery declares that account books ‘give limited insight into attitudes’, as account books and clothing bills rarely state why people bought these objects or who they bought them for, but it does seem that some social, cultural or personal meanings can be revealed through such material.<sup>29</sup>

The first case study, Mrs Marianne Grove Price (1805-68) lived in Gloucestershire and was the widow of the M.P. for Sandwich and Deal, Samuel Grove Price (1793-1839).<sup>30</sup> Her husband died when she was aged 34. Some of her clothing bills survive from the period 1851 to 1861, so we can see something of her choices 12 years after her husband’s death. Her clothing lacked colour, which may have been a way of expressing her condition as a dignified widow. However, as we have no evidence from the first 12 years after his death, it is also possible that her black, white and grey clothes signified old age rather than widowhood.<sup>31</sup> Between March and May 1851, in any case, she ordered a black silk jacket (16s.), a black cap (12s.6d.), a black mantle (£3) and a black satin bonnet (17s.6d.), while on 15 December 1853 she purchased a white lace jacket (6s.6d.).<sup>32</sup> From February to September 1859, she spent £14.3s.6d. on ordering several pairs of trousers, waistcoats and coats, though it is unclear whether these items belonged to Mrs Grove Price herself. They might have been a gift to her two sons Lettsom Grove Price and Stanhope Grove Price, or to her son-in-law, as her daughter married in September 1859. By providing clothing she was playing her female role as a dutiful housekeeper, caring mother or mother-in-law. Three bills, from 1859 and 1861, record the fact that Mrs Grove Price spent around £25.5s. on purchasing waistcoats and trousers from Mr Callan & Gould, Tailors, &c., a firm which produced ladies’ riding habits and leather breeches. If these objects were indeed for her herself, then it is likely that Mrs Grove Price went horse riding, which often required an invisible pair of trousers and a waistcoat to provide both warmth and mobility. Horse

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<sup>29</sup> Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, p. 109. On comparison of men and women’s areas of financial responsibility in account books, see Vickery, ‘His and Hers’; Harvey, *Little Republic*, pp. 80-87.

<sup>30</sup> Marianne was the daughter of William Page, formerly a council member in Bombay, and she married in 1830. *The Annual Register, or A View of the History and Politics of the Year 1839* (1840), pp. 345-346. When Mrs Grove Price died on 1 August 1868, her assets totalled £6,000. *England & Wales, National Probate Calendar*,

<[http://search.ancestry.co.uk/iexec?htx=View&r=5538&dbid=1904&iid=31874\\_222368-00264&fn=Marianne+Grove&ln=Price&st=r&ssrc=&pid=233220](http://search.ancestry.co.uk/iexec?htx=View&r=5538&dbid=1904&iid=31874_222368-00264&fn=Marianne+Grove&ln=Price&st=r&ssrc=&pid=233220)>[accessed 29 March 2012]

<sup>31</sup> Widows were often left with only a small income with which to dress their daughters as ‘beautifully’ as in the days when their father could pay the bills. ‘Sylvia’, *How to Dress Well*, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> GA:D3398/1/3/7.

riding was a popular and suitable amusement for all ages of women at the time.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, her surviving dress bills do not reveal that she ordered a corset or crinoline, which were the most fashionable undergarments at the time, but on 23 October 1860 she paid a bill for the repair of two petticoats (6d.) and the alteration of two more (1s.2d.).<sup>34</sup> This indicates that the ageing Mrs Grove Price (49-59) preferred a style of dress that had been fashionable in her early years.

Marianne Grove Price's personal account book covers the period between December 1867 and July 1868, and shows that every week she paid around two shillings for items of clothing such as chemises, habit shirts, nightgowns, drawers, stockings, night caps and pockets.<sup>35</sup> This personal account book could be considered to be a laundry record, as it was impossible to acquire these items for two shillings, except by hiring them. Cleanliness and neatness were of course middle-class virtues. However, one shilling could pay for a simple dressmaker-made skirt, so most middle-class women probably preferred their servants to clean their clothes in order to save on their clothing budget. This account book also seems to suggest that an older widow (63-64) rarely attended social activities, since it does not include details of shawls, cloaks, bonnets or dresses, though this could be because these items of clothing were often made of non-washable materials such as wool, worsted or silk. Moreover, pockets could be a symbol of Mrs Grove Price's financial power and autonomy, as they signified that she could safely carry money and keys.<sup>36</sup>

Living in the same county as Mrs Grove Price, Mrs Mary Baker (née Fenwick) (1815-1905) lived at Hardwicke Court and was the wife of the English educationalist, social reformer and ornithologist Thomas Barwick Lloyd Baker (1807-86).<sup>37</sup> Her dress account book spans the years between 1860 and 1876, and it reveals that she spent an

<sup>33</sup> On horse riding, see Chapter 6, pp. 248-249.

<sup>34</sup> GA:D3398/1/3/9.

<sup>35</sup> GA:D3398/1/3/4; D3398/1/3/17.

<sup>36</sup> On pockets, see Burman, 'Pocketing the Difference'; idem and J. White, 'Fanny's Pockets: Cotton, Consumption and Domestic Economy, 1870-1850', in J. Batchelor and C. Kaplan (eds.), *Women and Material Culture, 1660-1830* (Basingstoke, 2007), pp. 31-51; A. Fennetaux, 'Women's Pockets and the Construction of Privacy in the Long Eighteenth Century', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 20:3(2008), 307-334; C. T. Matthews, 'Form and Deformity: the Trouble with Victorian Pockets', *Victorian Studies*, 52:4(2010), 561-590. On the meaning of keys, see Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors*, pp. 42-44.

<sup>37</sup> They married in 1840. Thomas gained international recognition for pioneering a school for young offenders, the Hardwicke Reformatory, founded in 1852, GA:D3549/25/2/3. When Mr Baker died in 1886, his assets totalled £7,723.4s. (resworn in June 1887 as £8,171.4s.). Mrs Baker died in 1905, with personal assets of £743.2s. *England & Wales, National Probate Calendar*, <[http://search.ancestry.co.uk/iexec?htx=View&r=5538&dbid=1904&iid=31874\\_222605-00264&fn=Thomas+Barwick+Lloyd&ln=Baker&st=r&ssrc=&pid=91888](http://search.ancestry.co.uk/iexec?htx=View&r=5538&dbid=1904&iid=31874_222605-00264&fn=Thomas+Barwick+Lloyd&ln=Baker&st=r&ssrc=&pid=91888)>, <[http://search.ancestry.co.uk/iexec?htx=View&r=5538&dbid=1904&iid=31874\\_223153-00114&fn=Mary&ln=Baker&st=r&ssrc=&pid=5686890](http://search.ancestry.co.uk/iexec?htx=View&r=5538&dbid=1904&iid=31874_223153-00114&fn=Mary&ln=Baker&st=r&ssrc=&pid=5686890)> [accessed 29 March 2012]

average of £112 a year on dress consumption. It is not easy to count exactly how many items of clothing she had, as she rarely marked the number of items. The materials her clothes were made of are varied, including alpaca, *barège*, cashmere, *glacé*, grenadine, kid, mohair, moiré, muslin, silk, satin and velvet, all of which must have played a role in her social life. Her wardrobe was not so colourful, though, and was mainly based on shades of blue, brown, green, white, black and grey, which could be a reflection on her middle-aged status (45-51). There is one exception, ordered in 1862: a mauve silk gown with lace (£7.16s.), which demonstrates that she did follow fashion. In general terms, however, she balanced fashion and elegance as might be expected of a woman of her age who did not have a 'rainbow' wardrobe.<sup>38</sup> Compared with Mrs Grove Price, though, colourful clothes seemed to express Mrs Baker's celebration of life, and moreover she is the only individual covered by my research who purchased three pairs of 'corsets', costing from £2.2s. to 13s.9d. between 1875 and 1876, revealing her concern with achieving a fashionable silhouette, given that 1875-76 was the era of the tight waist and bustle. This could be explained by the fact that she was younger than the other individuals studied, and thus more likely to follow the latest fashions.

Mrs Mary Ann Spring (1803-78) was the wife of the builder, house surveyor and land agent Henry Thomas Spring (1800-75), and also lived in Gloucestershire.<sup>39</sup> In her account book, from December 1869 to March 1872, she spent around £1.10s. per month on buying textiles, such as calico, cotton, flannel, velvet and wool; trimmings, including braid, cord, fringe, lace, netting and ribbon; and needles.<sup>40</sup> As there are so many textiles and trimmings recorded in her account book, it might be possible that Mrs Spring was a merchant or dressmaker. According to the English census of 1871, though, she did not have any occupation.<sup>41</sup> It seems probable that this account book was not

<sup>38</sup> On bright colours in Victorian women's dresses, see Chapter 2, pp. 108-113.

<sup>39</sup> Mr Spring died in 1875, and his personal assets came to £300. In 1878, Mrs Spring's personal assets were under £100. *English & Wales, National Probate Calendar*, <[http://search.ancestry.co.uk/iexec?htx=View&r=5538&dbid=1904&iid=31874\\_222821-00142&fn=Henry+Thomas&ln=Spring&st=r&ssrc=&pid=4745297](http://search.ancestry.co.uk/iexec?htx=View&r=5538&dbid=1904&iid=31874_222821-00142&fn=Henry+Thomas&ln=Spring&st=r&ssrc=&pid=4745297)>, <[http://search.ancestry.co.uk/iexec?htx=View&r=5538&dbid=1904&iid=31874\\_222806-00148&fn=Mary+Ann&ln=Spring&st=r&ssrc=&pid=3104269](http://search.ancestry.co.uk/iexec?htx=View&r=5538&dbid=1904&iid=31874_222806-00148&fn=Mary+Ann&ln=Spring&st=r&ssrc=&pid=3104269)> [accessed 29 March 2012]

<sup>40</sup> GA:D1858/A4. Her expenses corresponded to the advice book *How to Dress on £15 A Year as A Lady*.

<sup>41</sup> Her son, Frank G. H. Spring, was a builder and carpenter. 1871 *English Census*, <[http://search.ancestry.co.uk/iexec?htx=view&r=5538&dbid=7619&iid=GLSRG10\\_2628\\_2631-0239&fn=Mary+Ann&ln=Spring&st=r&ssrc=&pid=1582037](http://search.ancestry.co.uk/iexec?htx=view&r=5538&dbid=7619&iid=GLSRG10_2628_2631-0239&fn=Mary+Ann&ln=Spring&st=r&ssrc=&pid=1582037)> [accessed 29 March 2012] The occupation of middle-class women as stated in the census is notoriously unreliable, because in this period women were considered to lose status if they worked. However, commercial dressmaking activities could have been done unofficially and not considered an 'occupation' as such. On the census of working women, see B. Hill, 'Women, Work and the Census: a Problem for Historians of Women', *History Workshop Journal*, 35:1(1995), 78-94; E. Higgs, 'Women, Occupation and Work in the Nineteenth Century Censuses', *Ibid.*, 23:1(1987), 59-80.

just Mrs Spring's personal one, but the record of her family's clothing, an apt representation of the domesticity of mid-Victorian women. Compared with Mrs Baker's account book, silk, a luxurious and delicate fabric, is seldom mentioned in Mrs Spring's records, and this might hint at the fact that the Springs rarely attended social occasions. Within these four years, the ageing (66-69) Mrs Spring ordered a dress (7s.11d.), a skirt (4s.11d.), a jacket (7s.11d.), three pairs of 'stays' (from 3s.6d. to 4s.11 1/2d.), ten collars, 12 pairs of gloves, four hats (1s.11 1/2 d.) and eight pairs of boots (from 3s.9d. to 8s.6d.). This implies that she was probably able to do some trimmings herself to vary the look of her clothes, and it is feasible that she could have made her own clothes, and that these professionally-made clothes were only for special events, or else that they were more complicated or involved new designs which she might not have been able to make. She also purchased whalebone (3 1/2d.), which suggested that she had good sewing skills to repair her old 'stays'. Otherwise, she would have recorded fees for dressmaking and alterations paid to a tailor or a dressmaker.

Apart from the above three cases, a tailor's notebook found in the same county, provides us with still more information about dress consumption. This tailor's notebook, dated from 1864 to 1866 and held at the GA, contains the customers' names, measurements, ordered items and costs, but it is hard to establish who exactly the customers were or what kind of social background they came from, because it does not always record the customers' full names.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, there is no existing document to support who the tailor himself was. In this tailor's book, the customers were mainly male, with the exception of five female customers, including Mrs Sarah Wilks, Mrs Spear, Miss A Waters, Miss Copleston and Miss Caves. Despite the fact that women were able to order their dresses under their father's or husband's name, no male customers in this tailor's book ordered female items. The reason for this lack of female customers could well be because a tailor-made dress was more expensive than a dressmaker-made one, or perhaps because tailors were often men, and the process of measurement was an intimate one, and so naturally women attempted to avoid scandalous exposure. Another reason why these three single women only ordered dresses for a short while could have been that they got married and moved away from Gloucester.

On 30 September 1864, Mrs Sarah Wilks bought black silk (2s.6d.) and ordered four petticoats (5s.6d.), a black petticoat (1s.), a pair of drawers (1s.), two

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<sup>42</sup> All of the measurements are men's. GA:D6193/2/1.

morning dresses (6s.), a skirt (3s.6d.), three black dresses (13s.6d.) and a cap (6d.).<sup>43</sup> It is unclear why she bought so many black items, and whether she was a widow or in mourning, or simply an older woman. She also asked for a silk dress to be cleaned (1s.). In the course of her second order, between June and July 1865, she requested two dresses (5s. and 4s.6d.), a cloth jacket (9s.), trimmings (2s.4d.), the repair of four print dresses (2s.6d.) and four print jackets (2s.), the remaking of one dress (3s.) and two silk jackets (4s.), and the cleaning of two jackets and three dresses (3s.6d.). This reflects the fact that Mrs Wilks was a thrifty wife, who not only ordered new items, but also asked for her old objects to be cleaned and repaired to keep them in good condition.<sup>44</sup> On 23 June 1866, she also purchased a 12s.6d. knickerbocker suit, which could perhaps have been for her husband, son or father. Normally, gentlemen tended to order their suits by themselves, though it is true that, from the 1860s onwards, some women started to wear knickerbockers, and that women's clothing was not referred to as a 'suit'.<sup>45</sup>

According to Mrs Spear's order from December 1865 to January 1866, she spent £1.6s.6d. on altering a morning dress (1s.6d.), a light silk dress (1s.3d.), a pink dress (2s.) and a light walking jacket (2s.); making two velvet jackets (5s.); lining bodices and sleeves (3s.); and buying lace (6d.).<sup>46</sup> It was often thought best that a close-fitting jacket should be made by a tailor, and such a jacket could be worn for a longer period. Several *EDM* readers complained that it was not easy to find a good dressmaker who could make a well-fitting dress, particularly in the countryside. Mrs Spear often ordered new jackets and altered old ones, suggesting that she took part in a lot of outdoor activities. She seems to have been a thoughtful, prepared woman, too, given that she requested alterations for a light dress and jacket, which might have been for spring wear.

Between October 1865 and January 1866, Miss Caves bought two new dresses (8s.6d.) and a gingham skirt (1s.6d.), and requested the repair of a white lace dress (1s.).<sup>47</sup> She may, like Charlotte Brontë, have wanted to repair the lace of the dress to improve its quality, to provide a better match with her other accessories, or to make it more fashionable. In March and May 1866, she ordered a green silk skirt (2s.9d.) and a brown silk dress with a lined skirt (4s.6d.). This corresponds, too, to Mrs Spear's

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> On Elizabeth Shackleton mending, making over, retrimming and redyeing her clothes, see Vickery, *Gentleman's Daughter*, p. 151.

<sup>45</sup> On tailors' confidential relationship with their customers, see C. Horwood, *Keeping up Appearances: Fashion and Class between the Wars* (Stroud, 2005), p. 23; Ugolini, *Menswear*, pp. 234-240.

<sup>46</sup> GA:D6193/2/1.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*



purchase of a brown silk bodice (2s.) and a green silk dress (5s.6d.). Green and brown were considered fashionable colours, as well as the most economical ones for dresses,<sup>48</sup> and this indicates that women were not blindly following fashion, but that they tried to make a compromise between fashionability and durability in their dresses. In June 1866, Miss Caves asked for four silk skirts to be remade, and this was charged at a rate ranging from 3s. to 1s. At the time, the wider skirt was gradually becoming unfashionable, so it is possible that Miss Caves had her old wider skirt revamped to conform with newer fashions.

The final case study, Miss Clarke was a dressmaker at High Street, Godalming, Surrey between 1873 and 1883.<sup>49</sup> According to her records between 1873 and 1875, there were no male customers, and indeed the majority were married women, with only three single females. It was normal that married women should have greater financial resources than unmarried women.<sup>50</sup> ‘Sylvia’ argued that a married woman had to dress with ‘a very small allowance’, a shilling a day or £18.5s. a year, but that it was difficult for a unmarried woman to dress on £15 a year.<sup>51</sup> Miss Clarke’s charges seem to have been cheaper, compared with those in the individual account books and bills discussed above. For example, she only charged one shilling for making a bonnet, whereas on 5 September 1871 Mrs William Ashbuner Forbes, or Laura Charlotte Every, the daughter of Samuel Grove Price, had spent 25s.6d. on buying a hat with a velvet bow.<sup>52</sup> It is possible that the materials and design used affected the cost of this bonnet and hat, but as Miss Clarke’s records sometimes lack details of the materials and trimmings, it is difficult to judge whether her charge included the cost of materials, or whether the materials were provided by her customers. The price difference could also have been the result of the quality of the dressmaking. ‘Miss Clarke does not appear in Directories of [Surrey], but some of her customers do, including Mrs Graymark, shopkeeper and beer retailer of Meadrow’.<sup>53</sup> According to a local study, Miss Clarke did not advertise herself, and for that reason her charges were cheaper than those of others.

<sup>48</sup> ‘Sylvia’, *How to Dress Well*, p. 115. The bright shades that were fashionable at one time faded very rapidly.

<sup>49</sup> SHC:1261. In the 1870s, she lived with John Clarke (b. 1818), who was a tailor and draper, according to the 1851 census, but it is unclear whether John was her brother or father.

<sup>50</sup> On the dress etiquette of married and unmarried women, see Chapter 1, pp. 59-60.

<sup>51</sup> ‘Sylvia’, *How to Dress Well*, p. 15.

<sup>52</sup> SHC:1261/5. Laure married the Bengal Civil Service employee and Deputy Commissioner of Oudhe and Commissioner of Bangalore, William Asburner Forbes (1821-97), on 27 September 1859. GA:D3398/1/3/14.

<sup>53</sup> *The Clarke Family of Godalming*,

< [http://www.exploringsurreypast.org.uk/GetRecord/SHCOL\\_1261](http://www.exploringsurreypast.org.uk/GetRecord/SHCOL_1261) > [accessed 10 April 2012]

The evidence from this dressmaker's notebook shows that many customers ordered a polonaise, which cost between 3s.9d. and £1.2s, and was particularly fashionable in the 1870s.<sup>54</sup> This reveals that most of her customers did follow the latest fashions. Miss Clarke's 27 customers purchased a total of 78 dresses, nine skirts, eight jackets and seven bodices. Altering (48) was the second most requested job for Miss Clarke. Altering a dress was done not just to fit in with the latest fashions, but also to suit changes in the wearer, such as figure and age. Wearing a dress that was too loose or too tight was considered to be indecorous. Lining sleeves, bodices and skirts, which was charged at a rate from 6d. to 1s.7 1/2d., was also frequently requested, showing that Miss Clarke's customers did consider issues of comfort. Lining allowed clothes to be put on and taken off easily, as well as protecting a garment from perspiration and reducing the wear on a dress and extending its lifetime. Lining also added warmth and modesty, especially for light materials. It should be noted that there were eight objects made of silk, but 13 made of cotton, and that only three cases required a trimming, which indicates that Miss Clarke's customers had smaller budgets than those of the Gloucestershire tailor, and that they preferred to add trimmings themselves.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, velvet seemed to be an attractive fabric for making a jacket. Mrs Spean, for example, purchased two velvet jackets (5s.) in 1865, while Miss A. Waters ordered two walking jackets (12s.), one of which was made of velvet, in January 1866, and Mrs Watson ordered a velvet jacket (4s.) on 16 September 1875.<sup>56</sup>

In my case studies, most women ordered their dresses, jackets and skirts from a professional maker, and with time kept altering or repairing the items to maintain their quality or to fit their changed figure and age. Children's clothes are largely absent from the tailor's and dressmaker's notebooks, as well as from individual women's clothing bills. There are two exceptions: in 1860, Mrs Forbes paid 5s.9d. for making baby linen, six baby caps and three baby shirts; and on 18 July 1873, Mrs Pink ordered a 2s.6d. boy's suit from Miss Clarke.<sup>57</sup> This probably suggests that most of the women I researched either had servants to sew or alter clothes for their children to save on clothing budgets, or else that they did it themselves. It is also possible that their children were old enough to order their clothes themselves. Similarly, the women rarely

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<sup>54</sup> There was a total of 13 polonaises. SHC:1261/5.

<sup>55</sup> No cotton objects are recorded in the Gloucestershire tailor's account book. GA:D6193/2/1.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*; SHC:1261/5.

<sup>57</sup> GA:D3398/1/3/14; SHC:1261/5.

purchased shirts or undergarments such as chemises and drawers, which did not require a high level of sewing skills as compared with other female clothes.<sup>58</sup>

Neither the women's clothing bills nor the tailor's account book have any records of an evening dress. Miss Caves is the only example, requesting a white lace evening dress from Miss Clarke in 1866.<sup>59</sup> These documents suggest that mid-Victorian middle-class women did not spend much money on buying evening dresses, though it is true that it was not necessary for the women, the tailor or the dressmakers to note in detail the items which they bought or made, because such documents were for recording the price rather than individual items. In 1871, the *EDM* reader 'Belle et Blonde', who had £85.19s.4d. in her account book, declared that:

I do not spend a very large sum on dress [...]. All my expense lies in my walking toilets, for I never go out to ball or party, as I have an invalid mother whose companion leaves us to pass the evening together, and for evening I invariably wear white muslin over silk of some colour (my dear mother liking me best in white).<sup>60</sup>

This reveals that for 'Belle et Blonde', evening or ball dresses were not as important as walking dresses, since she did not have many opportunities to attend a ball or party.<sup>61</sup> One of the reasons why she would not spend much money on dresses could have been that she needed to save money for her sick mother. Obeying her mother's suggestion on wearing a white muslin dress for evening wear indicates that 'Belle et Blonde' preferred to follow personal advice rather than the fashion advice published in magazines. Though muslin was less expensive than silk, *The Hand-Book of Etiquette* commented that it was suitable for excursions and small dinner parties. Muslin dresses were therefore a graceful way of economising,<sup>62</sup> and this might also explain why few women in my case studies made specific records of an evening dress and why few evening dresses owned by middle-class women have survived in museums.<sup>63</sup>

To sum up, account books, clothing bills and dressmaking records reveal the ways middle-class women kept up a decent appearance and show that items of clothing could reflect a woman's virtues, marital status, sociability and fashionableness. The following section will go on to analyse what women's clothing inventories reveal about mid-Victorian dress consumption.

<sup>58</sup> Mrs Grove Price ordered a 6s.6d. muslin shirt on 3 October 1861. GA:D3398/1/3/9.

<sup>59</sup> SHC:1261/5.

<sup>60</sup> 'The Englishwoman's Conversazione', *EDM*, 1 July 1871, Issue 79, p. 61, GD:DX1901422034.

<sup>61</sup> On George Eliot's lack of a ball dress, see Chapter 1, pp. 70-71.

<sup>62</sup> *Hand-Book of Etiquette*, p. 9.

<sup>63</sup> On surviving evening dress, see Chapter 2, pp. 102-105.

## Clothes in Inventories

This section interprets evidence for the material culture of 26 inventories that include women's clothing. It concentrates on what types of clothes were most required by these women, and how these listed items reflected the social and cultural meanings of dress consumption together with women's sense of their own identity and sexuality.<sup>64</sup> A desire to be fashionable was not the only reason Victorian women purchased dresses and accessories: they were also motivated by social conformity, morality and etiquette. In a thousand Legacy Duty papers (IR19-95 to IR19-149) between 1850 and 1875, only 26 female inventories contain lists of clothes (Table 5-2 & Appendices 1-6): 12 of these belonged to spinsters, 13 widows and the remaining one (Esther Davis) was of unrecorded marital status.<sup>65</sup> The highest-valued assets, £10,767, corresponded to the widow Harriet Stephens, and the assets of four other women were between £7,574 and £1,382, with five between £948 and £602, three between £435 and £300, six between £296 and £130, and five under £96.<sup>66</sup> Whereas the duty papers of Betty Harley and Esther Davis contain no record of their personal assets, their inventories are valued at £26.3s.6d. and £5.10s.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> In these statistics, when the object is in the plural form, it counts as two, and when it is described as 'various', it counts as three.

<sup>65</sup> A middle-class spinster could work as a governess, which could give her a decent living. After the death of her parents, a middle-aged spinster might live with her sibling or relative as an unpaid housekeeper or companion. In this case, she might not have adequate financial support.

<sup>66</sup> Mrs Stephens' inventory (NA:IR19/106/260) lists the full decorations of seven rooms and two chambers, as well as the kitchen, larders and laundry, and numerous plates, glasses, china, jewellery and linen. However, it only contains seven items of clothing.

<sup>67</sup> The Legacy Duty papers only include the deceased's personal estate, but exclude real estate or settled property. The clothing inventory of the minor Arabella Cockel (NA:IR19/98/199) is valued at £3.10s., including bonnets, cloaks, dresses and other clothes. Such an amount was even less than the clothing budget of the baby (£5) for a family living on £200 a year, according to Warren's household management. Warren, *How I Managed*, p. 12. Arabella's mother was a widow, and did not have a job. Her 34 year-old brother Findley was a carpet weaver, and her 30 year-old sister Elizabeth was a milliner. *1851 English Census*, <[http://search.ancestry.co.uk/iexec?htx=view&r=5538&dbid=8860&iid=DURHO107\\_2390\\_2391-0120&fn=Arabella+Orebba&ln=Cockell&st=r&ssrc=&pid=14563386](http://search.ancestry.co.uk/iexec?htx=view&r=5538&dbid=8860&iid=DURHO107_2390_2391-0120&fn=Arabella+Orebba&ln=Cockell&st=r&ssrc=&pid=14563386)>[accessed 10 April 2012] NA:IR19/108/457. Mrs Harley was a bonnet maker. *1851 English Census*, <[http://search.ancestry.co.uk/iexec?htx=view&r=5538&dbid=8860&iid=YRKHO107\\_2310\\_2311-0109&fn=Betty&ln=Hartley&st=r&ssrc=&pid=12255659](http://search.ancestry.co.uk/iexec?htx=view&r=5538&dbid=8860&iid=YRKHO107_2310_2311-0109&fn=Betty&ln=Hartley&st=r&ssrc=&pid=12255659)>[accessed 10 April 2012]

Year of Birth		Age of Death		Place of Death		Value of Assets	
1761-1780	4	1-20	1	Middlesex	10	£11,000-1,000	5
1781-1800	4	21-40	1	Surrey	6	£999-500	5
1801-1820	1	41-60	2	Kent	3	£499-300	3
1821-1840	2	61-80	4	Essex	1	£299-100	6
1831-1860	1	81-100	3	Stafford	1	Under £99	2
Unknown	14	Unknown	14	Manningham	1	Unknown	2
				Durham	1		
				Hereford	1		
				Wilts	1		
				Unknown	1		
TOTAL	26	TOTAL	26	TOTAL	26	TOTAL	26

**Table 5-2. The Details of the 26 Women Who Died between 1850 and 1875**

The ideal wardrobe of a mid-Victorian woman was considered to include undergarments, such as chemises, drawers, corsets and petticoats. The chemise, which was often made from cheaper and easily-washed materials like linen or cotton, was a basic garment for Victorian women, because it protected the skin from the corset, which was important for the comfort of the wearer and prevented perspiration from damaging the valuable corset and outer garments. It also prevented the body being revealed when women wore translucent materials. Out of the 26 women, 17 of them (65%) had a total of 89 chemises, an average of 5.2 per woman. Such a high average number confirms the fact that women purchased chemises to hide the intimate part of their bodies and to prolong the life of their outer garments, thus proving their moral and economical character.<sup>68</sup> The other nine women, including the richest ones, Harriet Stephens and Dame Mary Foulis, did not have a chemise in their inventories.<sup>69</sup> It could be that their chemises were passed on to the younger generation, to friends, servants or others, before the inventories were made, or that the administrators did not list every object possessed by the deceased in the inventories, but only those objects which they thought most valuable.<sup>70</sup>

During the crinoline period (1856-67), drawers were regarded as an essential article of clothing.<sup>71</sup> They provided warmth, and protected women from showing their bare legs when they bent over, climbed a step, or fell over. However, out of the 26

<sup>68</sup> Out of the 89 chemises, four (5%) are marked as calico, and four (5%) as flannel. Cotton and calico were considered to be for use in warm weather, while flannel was for cold weather or winter use.

<sup>69</sup> NA:IR19/106/260; IR19/102/271.

<sup>70</sup> In the country, a chemise cost from 10d. to 1s.2d., while in the town, it cost from 1s. to 2s. Walsh, *Economy*, p. 339. As John Styles notes, 'women were especially likely to use their wills to make gifts of specific, cherished items of clothing as tokens of affection'. Styles, *Dress*, p. 249. This could be one reason why many inventories lack items of clothing.

<sup>71</sup> On poor women wearing open drawers, see Richmond, 'Stitching the Self'; idem, *Finery*, pp. 83-85. On drawers and eroticism, see J. Fields, 'Erotic Modesty: (Ad)ressing Female Sexuality and Propriety in Open and Closed Drawers, USA, 1800-1930', in Burman and Turbin (eds.), *Material Strategies*, pp. 122-145.

women, only four (15%) appear to have owned drawers, perhaps indicating that drawers were not much in demand among mid-Victorian women. Mercy Arnold and Charlotte Rositer, who were in possession of £3,282 and £1,382 respectively, owned six pairs of drawers, while Ann Wilkinson and Caroline Meadows, with £602 and £182, respectively, owned three drawers.<sup>72</sup> One might wonder whether the use of drawers was less controversial among the wealthy.<sup>73</sup> In 1850, though, Lady Chesterfield, Anne Elizabeth Weld-Forester (1802-85), wrote a letter to her daughter, stating that drawers were ‘comfortable garments we all wear but none of us talk about’.<sup>74</sup> As drawers were considered immodest, unmentionable and unfeminine for women at the time, this could be one of the reasons why they are rarely recorded in these inventories, as compared with chemises. This suggests that clothing was strongly linked to identity, as it shows that even in the recording of inventories, the privacy and modesty of the woman was protected by not recording her intimate items. Items of clothing continued to affect the way her identity was constructed and recorded even after death. Although the function of stockings was similar to that of drawers, the reason why more stockings (110) than drawers (18) are listed in these inventories was probably that stockings, like chemises, were beyond controversy, but were in accordance with female morality.

Out of the 26 women, 12 (46%) had a total of 18 pairs of ‘stays’, an average of 1.5 ‘stays’ each. The reason why these inventories use the eighteenth-century term rather than the fashionable French term ‘corset’ could be because, out of the 12 inventories, 11 were made by men, who might have had less sense of the latest female fashions.<sup>75</sup> It may be that these 12 women had been passed down their grandmother’s or mother’s old ‘stays’, or that they still followed obsolete fashions, given that most of them had been born in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The uncorseted female body in the Victorian period was thought to be immodest and a symbol of poverty, but it is difficult to understand why the other 14 women, such as the innkeeper Martha Flavell (1784-1852), the physician’s aunt Sophia Barrett (1767-1852), and Dame Mary Foulis (1804-52), did not possess a pair of ‘stays’ or a corset, though this

<sup>72</sup> NA:IR19/128/1355; IR19/135/25; IR19/95/693; IR19/149/1394. Miss Meadows’s father Henry was a fundholder; and her brother Henry John was a general agent. *1861 English Census*, <<http://search.ancestry.co.uk/iexec?htx=view&r=5538&dbid=8860&iid=Caroline&gsln=Meadows&h=5200515>>[accessed 10 April 2012]

<sup>73</sup> A pair of drawers was charged at a price between 8d. and 1s. in the country, and between 10d. and 1s. 6d. in the town. Walsh, *Economy*, p. 339.

<sup>74</sup> Cited in J. Stuart, *History Drawers on the Evolution of Women’s Knickers* (Bloomington, IN, 2011), p. 10; Cunningham, *English Women’s Clothing*, p. 21.

<sup>75</sup> An inventory could be made by a husband, wife, parents, children, siblings, next of kin, creditors or others, at the discretion of the court. Grannum et al. (eds.), *Wills*, p. 48.



might be the result of the fact that no 'corset' was required in the Regency period when the deceased were young.<sup>76</sup> Since the inventories do not always record the complete wardrobe of the deceased, their corsets could also have been passed on to others. It is probable too that at the end of their lives a corset was not a crucial article for women, though the annuitant Martha Dunsdon (1785-1854) and the blacksmith Sarah Green (1778-1857) owned two and one 'stays' respectively.<sup>77</sup> Most interestingly, the women worth under £500 had an average of 0.79 pairs of 'stays', whereas those worth over £500 had 0.6 pairs. There therefore seems to be no exact correlation between a corseted body and wealth and fashion-consciousness in women.

The final layer of the undergarments was the petticoat, which provided warmth and supported the shape of the skirt.<sup>78</sup> The petticoat is one of the most popular objects in these inventories. Out of the 26 women, 20 (77%) owned petticoats, and each one had an average of 4.95 petticoats.<sup>79</sup> Such a number of petticoats could have supported a fairly large and wide skirt, but it is noticeable that no inventories in this research include a crinoline. This could be because ten of the women died before 1856 when the crinoline was introduced, five more died between 1857 and 1858, and two who died at the age of 81 in 1860 and the age of 97 in 1863, were unlikely consumers of crinoline. Queen Victoria and Florence Nightingale (1820-1910), for example, disapproved of the crinoline.<sup>80</sup> Lucinda Edwards and Mercy Arnold, who did live during the crinoline

<sup>76</sup> NA:IR19/99/420; IR19/101/782; IR19/102/271. Mrs Flavell was a shopkeeper and innkeeper. *1851 England Census*, <[http://search.ancestry.co.uk/iexec?htx=view&r=5538&dbid=8860&iid=WORHO107\\_2035\\_2036-0577&fn=Martha&ln=Flavell&st=r&ssrc=&pid=8843159](http://search.ancestry.co.uk/iexec?htx=view&r=5538&dbid=8860&iid=WORHO107_2035_2036-0577&fn=Martha&ln=Flavell&st=r&ssrc=&pid=8843159)>[accessed 10 April 2012] Davidoff and Hall have argued that during the first half of the nineteenth century women undoubtedly ran inns. Particularly when a male innkeeper died, he often made a will to pass on his business to his wife. Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 299. Miss Barrett had lived with her nephew Anthony Southery, who had been a physician but who no longer practised. *1851 England Census*, <[http://search.ancestry.co.uk/iexec?htx=view&r=5538&dbid=8860&iid=MDXHO107\\_1493\\_1493-0655&fn=Sophia&ln=Barrett&st=r&ssrc=&pid=2406045](http://search.ancestry.co.uk/iexec?htx=view&r=5538&dbid=8860&iid=MDXHO107_1493_1493-0655&fn=Sophia&ln=Barrett&st=r&ssrc=&pid=2406045)>[accessed 10 April 2012] Owing to health issues, Victorian physicians advised women to abandon their corsets, particularly in the late 1860s. This could be one of the reasons why a corset is absent from the inventory of Sophia Barrett. Her inventory contains few possessions, suggesting that an old spinster depended on her relatives, and might have had little financial support to purchase personal objects. Again, there is no doubt that her personal objects could have been passed on to others. On the effect of corsets on health, see Steele, *Corset*, ch. 3, pp. 66-85.

<sup>77</sup> NA:IR19/102/116; IR19/116/347. Mrs Dunsdon's son John was a proprietor of houses and land. *1851 English Census*, <[http://search.ancestry.co.uk/iexec?htx=view&r=5538&dbid=8860&iid=NTTHO107\\_1836\\_1836-0342&fn=Martha&ln=Dunsdon&st=r&ssrc=&pid=16873512](http://search.ancestry.co.uk/iexec?htx=view&r=5538&dbid=8860&iid=NTTHO107_1836_1836-0342&fn=Martha&ln=Dunsdon&st=r&ssrc=&pid=16873512)>[accessed 10 April 2012] Mrs Green's son William was also a blacksmith. *1851 English Census*, <[http://search.ancestry.co.uk/iexec?htx=view&r=5538&dbid=8860&iid=BRKHO107\\_1704\\_1704-0078&fn=Sarah&ln=Green&st=r&ssrc=&pid=3885380](http://search.ancestry.co.uk/iexec?htx=view&r=5538&dbid=8860&iid=BRKHO107_1704_1704-0078&fn=Sarah&ln=Green&st=r&ssrc=&pid=3885380)>[accessed 10 April 2012]

<sup>78</sup> In 1856, a petticoat cost between 2s. and 4s. Walsh, *Economy*, p. 339. In Mrs Baker's account book between 1860 and 1876, petticoats cost an average of £1. GA:D3549/26/2/5. According to Miss Clarke's dressmaking records from between 1873 and 1875, making a petticoat cost 1s. SHC:1261/5.

<sup>79</sup> Out of the 99 petticoats, 30 (30%) are marked as flannel, and six (6%) as cotton.

<sup>80</sup> Byrde, *Fashion*, p. 58.

period, on the other hand, possessed six and nine petticoats respectively.<sup>81</sup> Whereas this does not mean that women tended to wear all of their petticoats at once, it could also be the case that some women preferred wearing several petticoats to a crinoline as a way of achieving the fashionable wide-skirted silhouette. In these 26 inventories, the high number (99) of petticoats listed reflects the low popularity of crinolines (0) and drawers (18). One of the reasons why the crinoline is omitted in these inventories could be that it was in some way thought immodest, even though it was promoted as so fashionable by the magazines of the time. On the other hand, as the crinoline was so fashionable, it was perhaps passed on to others before an inventory was taken. The wearing of numerous undergarments enabled Victorians' dresses to protect the body from dirt, and they also provided warmth, shaped the female body, supported a fashionable silhouette and maintained modesty.

As regards outer garments, the 'dress' is clearly the most important women's garment in these inventories. Out of the 26 women, 22 (85%) had dresses.<sup>82</sup> On average, a woman worth under £500 owned 4.07 dresses, while those worth over £500 owned an average of 7.7 dresses. Dame Mary Foulis and Harriet Wigan, worth over £700, possessed 25 and 13 dresses respectively.<sup>83</sup> This might indicate that women worth under £500 had less money to purchase items of clothing, or that they did not attend as many social activities as wealthier women did. It is perhaps also relevant that another three women who have no dress listed were spinsters. Each widow had an average of 6.15 dresses, and each spinster 4.75, which confirms that single women often possessed fewer items than married ones, in contrast to Diana Crane's argument that nineteenth-century unmarried working-class Frenchwomen spent more money on clothing than the married.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, out of the 142 dresses listed, 73 (51%) are marked with the materials but with no details about design patterns. The dresses marked are overwhelmingly made of silk and satin (62%), as well as wool (25%), the latter

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<sup>81</sup> NA:IR19/121/702; IR19/128/1355. Miss Edwards was a retired schoolmistress and a boarder in the Giles family. *1861 English Census*,

<[http://search.ancestry.co.uk/cgi-bin/sse.dll?rank=1&new=1&MSAV=1&msT=1&gss=angs-g&gsfn=Lucinda+&gsln=Edwards&msddy=1863&msdpn\\_\\_ftp=Middlesex&cpxt=1&catBucket=rstp&uidh=ia1&cp=11&pcat=ROOT\\_CATEGORY&h=8509176&db=uki1861&indiv=1](http://search.ancestry.co.uk/cgi-bin/sse.dll?rank=1&new=1&MSAV=1&msT=1&gss=angs-g&gsfn=Lucinda+&gsln=Edwards&msddy=1863&msdpn__ftp=Middlesex&cpxt=1&catBucket=rstp&uidh=ia1&cp=11&pcat=ROOT_CATEGORY&h=8509176&db=uki1861&indiv=1)>[accessed 10 April 2012]

<sup>82</sup> The inventories of Martha Flavell (Stafford), Betty Hartley (Manningham) and Sarah Green (Essex) use the term 'gown' instead of 'dress', possibly implying that the usage of dress terms in the provinces differed from places nearer to London. NA:IR19/99/420; IR19/108/457; IR19/116/347. However, another three inventories registered in Durham, Hereford and Wiltshire also use the word 'dress'.

<sup>83</sup> NA:IR19/102/271; IR19/95/16.

<sup>84</sup> Crane, *Fashion*, p. 63.

category including stuff, *barège*, merino and alpaca.<sup>85</sup> This indicates that for these women, keeping up a 'decent' appearance was a top priority.

In the case of shirts and skirts, out of the 26 women, only three (12%), each worth over £600, possessed one, two or three shirts or bodices, which is in accordance with those account books and clothing bills that suggest that few women ordered a shirt or bodice. Six women (23%) possessed one, two, three, five, six and nine skirts, respectively, and Charlotte Rositer is the only one who had both shirts and skirts.<sup>86</sup> This might suggest that these 26 women preferred to wear a 'dress', despite the fact that the bodice and skirt were generally worn separately by the end of the 1850s. Perhaps the term 'dress' as used in these inventories could be regarded as a 'suit', where both bodice and skirt were made of the same material, but were not necessarily attached. Victorian skirts, made of a plentiful amount of fabric, were probably recorded more often, as they were more valuable, while shirts, often made of linen or cotton, could be altered for children or for general household use, which could explain their absence from these inventories. Few women's shirts from this period have survived in museums.

Out of the 26 women, six, whose assets were between £381 and £1,798, had both night garments and caps, which were worn in bed to keep the hairstyle in place, to protect the head and hair and to keep the wearer warm on cold nights.<sup>87</sup> This might demonstrate that well-to-do, self-disciplined women followed dress etiquette even if night clothes were not often worn in front of others. Elizabeth Grout (£168) owned no night garments, whereas her chemises are divided according to day and night use, revealing that some women attempted to use other articles instead if they were not rich enough to buy all types of clothing items, in accordance with dress etiquette.<sup>88</sup> On average, women worth over £500 had 5.7 night garments and caps, while those worth

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<sup>85</sup> Four per cent of these dresses are marked as muslin, and two per cent as cotton.

<sup>86</sup> NA:IR19/135/25.

<sup>87</sup> The night garments in these 26 inventories, including nightgowns, nightdresses and dressing gowns, were often made in a loose style and regarded as a bedroom garment or an informal garment for a private breakfast or for indoor wear. Women's letters and diaries show not only what women dressed for, but also what they were used to calling their dress. The terms 'nightgown' and 'nightdress' were rarely mentioned during the nineteenth century, according to B&I. The inventory of Harriet Wigan is the exception, listing as it does both a 'dressing gown' and a 'nightgown'. The term 'nightgown' in the eighteenth century meant a woman's evening dress, so it is hard to know whether or not Wigan's 'dressing gown' was for use in the evening or for sleeping. The dressmaking account book of Miss Clarke records that two nightdresses were charged at 4s. in February 1875, and one dressing gown at 3s.9d. in September 1875. SHC:1261/5. Of the 59 night garments, six (10%) are marked as made of calico, four (7%) as cotton, one (2%) as flannel and one (2%) as wool. The use of silk for making nightdresses was only for luxury. Elizabeth Lake, whose assets were valued at £300, owned a 'night silk dress' (10s.). NA:IR19/135. It might of course be questioned whether this 'night dress' in fact referred to an evening dress.

<sup>88</sup> NA:IR19/121/788.

under £500 had 1.78, which again suggests that night clothes and caps might symbolise the wearer's social status.

Out of the 26 women, 17 (65%) had outdoor garments, including cloaks, capes, mantles, mantillas, *visites* and jackets, and six women had two outdoor garments, five had one, two had four, two had three, and two, six and seven respectively. Outdoor garments were an important accessory for women going out, because they helped to maintain warmth, modesty and gentility, helping women to avoid showing off their bodies and protecting their skin from getting darker. Of the seven women who died between 1864 and 1874, three possessed two jackets, and one had one. It is unclear what sort of jackets these were, but from the late 1850s short jackets, such as the Zouave jacket and the Garibaldi jacket, had become more attractive than cloaks, particularly in summertime. Moreover, the spinster Ellen Gardiner, whose assets were valued at £634, owned three waistcoats, a garment which was described as fashionable in women's magazines of the early 1850s, despite the fact that no surviving waistcoats have been found in museums.<sup>89</sup> This might suggest that a richer woman was more likely to adopt a new fashion, or perhaps it might also reflect her masculine personality, explaining her not marrying. Out of the 44 outdoor garments, 16 are marked with their materials: seven were made of velvet (44%), five of silk (31%) and four of satin (25%). This corresponds to the Gloucestershire tailor's and the Surrey dressmaker's records, which appear to show that velvet was popular for making jackets. Velvet, which was as luxurious as silk but also provided a lot of warmth, was a good choice for winter outdoor garments.<sup>90</sup>

Compared with other types of outdoor garments, Victorian women seemed to prefer shawls to scarves. The 19 women (73%) in possession of shawls owned 65 shawls in total, with nine possessing one or two shawls, four possessing three, four with six or seven, and two with nine and four respectively. Even a woman worth under £500 had an average of 1.71 shawls. This could have been because it was easier for women to wear a shawl with a wider skirt than it was to wear a long cloak, which might not be as wide as the skirt.<sup>91</sup> The oriental Cashmere shawl, made of woollen material, not only

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<sup>89</sup> NA:IR19/99/620.

<sup>90</sup> Though velvet could be divided into cotton velvet and silk velvet, account books and inventories rarely specified what sort of velvet the dress was made of.

<sup>91</sup> On the history of shawls, see P. Clabburn, *A Shire Book: Shawls* (Princes Risborough, 2002); F. Irwin, 'The Printed Shawl in Scotland, c. 1785-1870', *Costume*, 15(1981), 24-39. On shawls in Victorian novels, see Gaskell, *North and South*; idem, *Cranford* (1853); S. Daly, 'Kashmir Shawls in Mid-Victorian Novels', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 30(2002), 237-255. Shawls for Frenchwomen, see Hiner, *Accessories to Modernity*, ch. 3, pp. 77-106; H. H. Hahn, *Scenes of Parisian Modernity Culture and Consumption in Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke, 2009), pp. 28-32.

provided women with warmth, but could also be a marker of their fashionableness. In 1856, Walsh noted that a handsome shawl, which was an expensive item, cost from three guineas to 40 or 50, and yet by the 1870s there was a variety of affordable shawls for different social classes.<sup>92</sup> Dame Mary Foulis, for example, owned an exotic Indian shawl, and Elizabeth Lake (£300) possessed a British-made 'Paisley shawl (12s.)'.<sup>93</sup> On 17 September 1873, one of the letters from George Eliot to Mrs Stuart states that:

the lovely shawl is come in safety. I supposed that Wordsworth would have rebuked me for calling a shawl 'lovely'. But I think the word is allowable in this case, where the exquisite texture seems to my imagination to hold much love in its meshes. It is really just the sort of garment I delight to wrap myself in- the utmost warmth compatible with the utmost lightness being my ideal of clothing for my feeble body.<sup>94</sup>

This letter shows how exciting it was for an old (57) woman to receive a light but warm shawl in the autumn season when the weather was not so stable, and when it was still considered unfashionable to wear a heavy coat, which might also have been too heavy for her 'feeble' body. In addition, it was only the four women worth over £600 who owned scarves: one, two, three and six respectively.<sup>95</sup> This reflects the reality that for these 26 women, scarves were not an indispensable accessory, which could be one reason why Mrs Carlyle altered her 'superfluous' scarf to turn it into a jacket.<sup>96</sup>

In addition, headdresses and gloves were considered to be an essential feature of Victorian respectability.<sup>97</sup> Every respectable woman had to put on a headdress and gloves before leaving the house. The headdress protected women from the sun, and was also a good accessory for women to hide a bare head or grey hair. Out of the 26 women, 15 (58%) had headdresses, with an average of 5.6 headdresses per woman.<sup>98</sup> After the 1860s, small hats were considered fashionable for young women, and bonnets for older

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<sup>92</sup> Walsh, *Economy*, p. 340. In 1871, the editor of *EDM* claimed that "Indian shawls are now selling at very moderate prices, and [...] they really are so cheap. Shawls are daily resuming their former importance in the wardrobe of *elegantes*, and we must all have an Indian shawl if we would avoid the unlucky fate of the unfortunate lady 'who is confined to the house when it's windier than usual, because her shawl isn't India'". The shawl was simply an elegant object in a wardrobe, but without an 'Indian' shawl, a woman would be ashamed to go out because she could not make a fashionable impression on the street. 'The Englishwoman's Exchange', *EDM*, 1 October 1871, Issue 82, p. 234, GD:DX1901422104.

<sup>93</sup> NA:IR19/102/271; IR19/135.

<sup>94</sup> Haight (ed.), *Eliot*, Vol. 5, p. 10, B&I:S7136-D459.

<sup>95</sup> NA:IR19/95/16; IR19/99/620; IR19/102/271; IR19/121/503.

<sup>96</sup> Mrs Baker seemed to prefer scarves to shawls, which never appeared in her account book. GA:3549/26/2/5. Froude (ed.), *Carlyle*, Vol. 2, p. 154, B&I:S4445-D070, see Chapter 4, p. 171.

<sup>97</sup> Richmond has argued that in nineteenth-century northern England poor women were used to wearing large handkerchiefs to cover their heads, rather than a hat or bonnet. Richmond, *Finery*, p. 51.

<sup>98</sup> On head coverings, see Chapter 1, pp. 62-63.

women.<sup>99</sup> The fact that no inventories in this research list a hat, though, might confirm the suspicion that the women in the case studies were relatively old. It is possible too that it was thought improper for women to wear hats in church, and so these 15 women chose to buy cheaper but more practical bonnets and caps.<sup>100</sup> The large number (84) of headdresses demonstrates, nevertheless, that covering the head was a significant concern for Victorian women.

On the other hand, only six women possessed gloves, with each one averaging 1.5 pairs. In total, the women worth under £500 had three pairs, while those worth over £500 had six. It seems likely that so small an object could easily have been omitted from the inventory, or else given away before the person died. Perhaps, too, gloves were damaged and became less valuable for records after they had been worn for a long time. There may also be a connection with the lack of evening dresses, which were often made with short sleeves and required gloves to be worn, though the low number (9) of gloves listed in these inventories does correspond with the lack of gloves shown in historical photographs.<sup>101</sup> This seems to imply that there were not many middle-class women who always wore gloves, despite the fact that they were recommended to keep hands soft, smooth and white.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, out of the 26 women, four possessed parasols and umbrellas, the former to protect women from the sun, and the latter mainly for protection from the rain. Three of these four women had assets of over £700, showing that wealthier women had more money available to purchase more objects, and also that pale skin was a mark of gentility.

Out of the 26 women, 11 (42%) possessed a total of 35 pairs of footwear, an average of 3.18 pairs for each of the women.<sup>103</sup> The fact that the other 15 women did not have a pair of shoes might be attributable to the fact that before they died, they had been sick and had not been out for a while. As these shoes and boots recorded in inventories are not specified according to the material or style, it is not easy to speculate on their actual functions. Shoes were expected to be worn indoors or in a private garden, and boots were for walking, as they were seen as better for the feet. By the 1860s,

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<sup>99</sup> At her Jubilee in 1887, Queen Victoria chose to wear a bonnet instead of her crown. A. Briggs, *Victorian Things* (1988), p. 263.

<sup>100</sup> 'Apropos of the Great Bonnet Question', *Punch*, 7 November 1857, p. 195, GD:DX1901549072. In 1863, Mrs Grove Price (58 years old) ordered the best-quality felt hat, at a cost of £1.15s. GA:D3398/1/3/9.

<sup>101</sup> On gloves in photography, see Chapter 3, p. 161.

<sup>102</sup> By 1875, aristocratic ladies started not to wear gloves in public. In 1876, the Princess Royal, for example, removed her gloves during religious services. Cunningham, *Handbook of English Costume*, p. 513.

<sup>103</sup> Out of the 26 inventories, none lists a pair of slippers, which were often homemade and had a short life.



though, boots had become very popular, and were worn on all occasions.<sup>104</sup> Indeed, all of the shoes (8) in the inventories were registered before 1863, and out of the 27 pairs of boots and galoshes, 17 were from the four inventories registered after 1864, confirming the growing popularity of boots for mid-Victorian women. Additionally, of the six women who owned footwear and who died between 1860 and 1875, three, with assets over £1,300, had one, four and six pairs of boots respectively, which might suggest that rather than staying at home, richer women were more actively involved in outdoor activities or social events.

As regards small accessories, out of the 19 inventories registered between 1850 and 1863, three list between three and four pairs of sleeves, two list nine and eleven pairs, and one lists one pair. Such sleeves could be considered to be undersleeves which were worn with fashionable open sleeves like pagoda or bell-shaped sleeves.<sup>105</sup> By the mid-1860s, though, open sleeves were completely out of fashion, and undersleeves were not required. The other seven inventories registered between 1864 and 1875 do not list any pairs of sleeves, and so it seems that the presence of such sleeves could reveal how fashionable the women were. On average, the women worth under £500 had one collar and 1.07 pairs of cuffs, whereas those worth over £500 had 2.1 collars and 1.6 pairs of cuffs.<sup>106</sup> Collars and cuffs were often detached from the dress or bodice, which allowed middle-class women to vary the look of dresses and reduce costs. In addition, the four women who died between 1850 and 1863 had on average 2.5 pockets, which should be regarded as tied-on pockets. Buck had this to say:

a pocket in the side seam was very usual in dresses of the early 1850s and was often included in silk dresses of the late 1850s and early 1860s. During the 1850s a small pocket for a watch was often made at the waist of the dress.<sup>107</sup>

It is likely that some of these women still wore the old style of dress, without a pocket attached. It was in any case easy and cheap to sew on a tied-on pocket, which could be made of old clothes or used materials, though it is true that these four women owned more assets and items of clothing than those who did not possess a pocket. Again, pockets in some way symbolised the authority of the wearer. Detachable pockets were popular for tying under the skirt when travelling, because this was more secure than carrying a bag.

<sup>104</sup> Buck, *Victorian Costume*, p. 146.

<sup>105</sup> Only the inventory of Elizabeth Goulston is marked with the material used for the sleeves, muslin. NA:IR19/121/788. Walsh argued that women should make their muslin sleeves at home, as it would cost them only half what ready-made sleeves would cost. Walsh, *Economy*, p. 339.

<sup>106</sup> Mrs Baker's collar and sleeves cost between 8s.6d. and £1.14s. GA:3549/26/2/5

<sup>107</sup> Buck, *Victorian Costume*, p. 31. On pockets, see above at n. 36, p. 214.

Out of the 26 women, eight (31%) had either handkerchiefs or pocket handkerchiefs.<sup>108</sup> Handkerchiefs were not only used for hygienic purposes, but some were also for display. The former type was often made of cotton or cambric, while the latter was silk or trimmed with lace.<sup>109</sup> On average, the women whose assets were valued at over £500 had 4.8 handkerchiefs, while those worth under £500 had 1.07. It was of course easy for women to sew or embroider their handkerchiefs by themselves to display their identity: the blacksmith Sarah Green, for example, had four handkerchiefs, and Mary Bradly (£96) had three.<sup>110</sup> This might correspond to John Styles' argument that fashion was largely based on clothing accessories, which were cheaper and more affordable than larger items.<sup>111</sup> Muffs, on the other hand, served to warm the hands in the winter, but they were always more of an identifier of social position than a protection against the cold.<sup>112</sup> As Buck commented, 'muffs never at any time appear to have been universal'.<sup>113</sup> Out of the 26 women, five (19%) possessed a total of 10 muffs, with Harriet Stephens (£10,767) and Harriet Wigan (£711) owning three, Ann Short (£641) and Ann Wilkinson (£602) owning one, and Jane Scott (£200), an exceptional case, in possession of two muffs, though it is unclear what kind of material they were made of.<sup>114</sup> Otherwise, the inventories seem to prove that muffs tended to belong to richer women.

Out of the 26 inventories, the colours of the objects are marked in ten of them, and they are mainly based on black and white.<sup>115</sup> This could be because black and white were generally recommended as the most useful and serviceable colours for clothes, but another reason could be that the case studies were mainly widows and

<sup>108</sup> Richmond points out that for many of the poor the pocket handkerchief was a novelty. Richmond, *Finery*, p. 41.

<sup>109</sup> In October 1861, Mrs Grove Price ordered 12 cambric handkerchiefs, which cost 15s. GA:D3398/1/3/7.

<sup>110</sup> NA:IR19/116/347; IR19/125/130. Handkerchiefs were regarded as a symbol of love, as women could make them and send them to their lovers. Hamlett argues that hand-worked gifts suggest women's domestic skills. Hamlett, *Material Relations*, p. 77. The handkerchief had long been a gift of betrothal similar to the modern engagement ring. H. Gustafson, *Hanky Panky: An Intimate History of the Handkerchief* (Berkeley, CA, 2002), p. 7.

<sup>111</sup> Styles, *Dress*, p. 219.

<sup>112</sup> A respectable woman wore a 'reasonable' sized muff. Fashionable muffs at the time were made of sable, chinchilla, astrakhan or skunk, and some were made of velvet bordered with fur. Buck, *Victorian Costume*, p. 177.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>114</sup> NA:IR19/106/260; IR19/95/16; IR19/113/341; IR19/95/693; IR19/146/335. Ann Short was a publican, and her nephew Henry Short, who lived with her, was a barman. *1851 English Census*, <[http://search.ancestry.co.uk/iexec?htx=view&r=5538&dbid=8860&iid=SRWHO107\\_1560\\_1560-0405&fn=Ann&ln=Short&st=r&ssrc=&pid=668641](http://search.ancestry.co.uk/iexec?htx=view&r=5538&dbid=8860&iid=SRWHO107_1560_1560-0405&fn=Ann&ln=Short&st=r&ssrc=&pid=668641)>[accessed 10 April 2012]

<sup>115</sup> NA:IR19/95/16; IR19/95/693; IR19/102/271; IR19/113/341; IR19/116/347; IR19/121/503; IR19/128/1355; IR19/135; IR19/147/1362; IR19/149/1394.

spinsters, who were expected not to wear very bright or colourful dresses.<sup>116</sup> However, almost all of them were unmarried women, predominantly of over 50 years of age, and they are therefore especially atypical with regard to fashion and mourning. Of the 142 dresses, seven that were mentioned as black belonged to five widows and one spinster, suggesting that these garments might signify the marital status of the deceased. Black was recommended as fashionable for dinner or evening wear when trimmed with narrow ribbons, braided work or lace, yet only one item is marked as black evening dress.<sup>117</sup> The widow Dame Mary Foulis' wardrobe is the most colourful one, including blue, grey, lilac, maroon, pink and yellow, as well as black and white.<sup>118</sup> This confirms that wealthier women could afford more colourful dresses, given that bright or light colours could easily fade or go out of fashion. Additionally, out of the 44 outdoor garments, nine are marked as black. This could be because outdoor garments were often made of non-washable materials, and thus black was a good choice to hide dirt, which might also explain the phenomenon whereby a number of sitters wore outdoor garments made of black velvet in historical photographs.<sup>119</sup> White clothes listed in these inventories are generally undergarments, like petticoats (7) and petticoat-bodices (8).<sup>120</sup>

However, the limitations of the terminology used in these 26 inventories make it impossible for them to reflect the complexity of women's dress in the mid-Victorian period. Five inventories (19%), for example, use the term 'various', and omit all other descriptions of the objects. This presents an obstacle for our understanding of what style of dresses the deceased wore, what kind of materials their clothes were made of, how they were decorated, and whether they were fashionable at the time. Moreover, the clothing recorded in these inventories is seldom described in terms of its function, such as a walking dress, a visiting dress, or a travelling dress. This could be because the deceased did not have many clothes, or because the administrator was not familiar with the specific function of items. Dame Mary Foulis is the only case which distinguishes between morning dress and evening dress, and this is probably because her inventory was made by her daughter, who knew more about dress etiquette and had personal

<sup>116</sup> 'A Lady', *How to Dress on £15 A Year as A Lady* (1873), p. 55.

<sup>117</sup> Routledge, *Ball-Room Guide*, p. 13.

<sup>118</sup> NA:IR19/102/271. Out of the 26 inventories, hers is the only case to use 'wardrobe' instead of 'wearing apparel'.

<sup>119</sup> On outdoor garments in photography, see Chapter 3, pp. 160-161.

<sup>120</sup> On the meaning of colours, see Chapter 1, pp. 48, 57, 61, 64-65; Chapter 2, pp. 100, 107-108, 112-113.

knowledge of what the clothes were for.<sup>121</sup> The inventory of Jane Scott, on the other hand, records three ‘common dresses’, which were considered to be ordinary dresses for everyday purposes, such as morning or indoor dress.<sup>122</sup> Five inventories (19%) describe some items as ‘old’, which might mean that they were bought long before the deceased died, or that the objects were of low quality or value.<sup>123</sup> Two inventories (8%) describe the objects as ‘much worn’.<sup>124</sup> These cases occur particularly in the inventories that list many items, and the words seem to identify the quality of each item. On the other hand, the inventory of Elizabeth Lake, which only includes six items, uses the terms ‘best’ and ‘fine’ as well as the value of each item, in order to emphasise the high quality of her objects.<sup>125</sup>

To sum up, although these samples are small, it is striking that in terms of the average numbers of clothes owned, the women worth over £500 had 57 items of clothing, and those worth under £500 had an average of 26.21; women from Middlesex had more items of clothing (51) than those from Kent (39) and Surrey (24), probably because the Middlesex women were wealthier on average. The widows had more items of clothing (44) than the spinsters (33), again probably because they were wealthier.

## Conclusion

Domestic economy, which was central to dress consumption, was an important factor in forging female domesticity and authority. Account books and dress records give a great deal of information as to consumer identity and preference. The lack of colour in her dress bills and account books signified Mrs Marianne Grove Price as a dignified widow. Buying trousers (probably for her sons or son-in-law) was presumably part of her maternal role, or it is possible they were there to enhance her mobility for horse riding. She also preferred wearing petticoats to crinolines, and her laundry account book reveals the large amounts a middle-class woman paid to maintain standards of cleanliness and neatness. In contrast, the varied dresses of middle-aged wife Mrs Mary Baker expressed sociability, and her mauve gown suggests her fashionableness. Mrs Mary Ann Spring, on the other hand, often bought fabrics rather than clothes, implying

<sup>121</sup> NA:IR19/102/271. Dame Mary Foulis married the eighth Baronet Sir William Foulis (1790-1845) on 11 May 1825. Her daughter Mary Foulis married the second Baron De L’Isle, Dudley Philip Sidney, on 23 April 1850, and died on 14 June 1891.

<sup>122</sup> NA:IR19/146/335.

<sup>123</sup> NA:IR19/95/693; IR19/99/420; IR19/102/271; IR19/121/503; IR19/121/702.

<sup>124</sup> NA:IR19/95/693; IR19/146/335.

<sup>125</sup> NA:IR19/135.

that she was good at sewing, and so could follow the suggestions of advice books to do dressmaking and trimming at home, displaying her domesticity and status as an economical housewife.

In the notebooks of the Gloucestershire tailor and the Surrey dressmaker, customers rarely requested shirts or children's items, confirming that a 'good' woman, wife or housekeeper could at least produce simple clothes for her family by herself, displaying female responsibility and care. These customers often asked for their old clothes to be altered or remade, showing that in order to keep up a decent appearance, thrifty women tried hard to maintain the condition and extend the lifetime of their possessions, and to adjust them to changes in their age and figure. Customers also preferred to order walking jackets rather than evening dresses, suggesting that mid-Victorian middle-class women attended more outdoor activities than evening parties.

Inventories can show which clothing items contemporaries thought were the most practical or essential. Inventories might present an ideal woman's wardrobe, but there were also the actual sets of clothing women accumulated, guided by the individual imperatives of their lives. According to the 26 female clothing inventories studied, the consumer motivations of middle-class women seemed to have been governed by a functional imperative rather than a fashionable one. To prove their moral and economical character, most women owned chemises, which hid the intimate parts of their bodies and prolonged the life of their outer garments, as well as enhancing the comfort of the wearer. Conversely, the controversial drawers were rarely listed in inventories, suggesting that clothing was strongly linked to women's modesty and identity. To maintain their respectability and gentility, most women owned at least one headdress and an outdoor garment. Shawls were the most fashionable accessory, and bonnets were much more widely accepted than hats. Gloves, on the other hand, are absent from the inventories and photographs, probably indicating that middle-class women had to do some housework and might not be able to wear gloves all the time, or even that the need for gloves was emphasised in prescriptive literature because many women just did not wear them.

Furthermore, despite the fact that undergarments were considered to be a vital support for the fashionable silhouette, none of the inventories, account books or clothing bills includes a key 'fashionable' item of the period – the crinoline. Most of them, too, used the old term 'stays' rather than the newer 'corset'. Mrs Baker is the only individual in my research who purchased 'corsets', revealing her concern for achieving

a fashionable silhouette. These findings challenge the assumption in historiography that the crinoline and the corset were as universally worn by mid-Victorian women as the magazines indicated. It is possible, of course, that these findings were influenced by the fact that most of my case studies were born in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and that it was not easy for them to adopt mid-Victorian fashions.

Account books, dress bills and inventories all suggest that mid-Victorian middle-class women attempted to present their morality, gentility, domesticity, sociability and decorum, and to keep up an elegant rather than fashionable appearance. To signify the importance of relationship between clothes and gender relations, the next chapter will look at how middle-class women used clothes to project their identity in accordance with their companions and activities.



## Chapter 6

### Women's Participation in Sport: Dress and Gender Relations

In 1837, the term 'sport' was identified with field sports, especially hunting, shooting and fishing, but by the 1860s it had started to be used to refer to a game or competitive activity played outdoors for pleasure with other young men.<sup>1</sup> Though 'sport' was still mostly associated with men, more and more middle-class women began to take part in a variety of sports, including angling, archery, bathing, cricket, croquet, hiking, horse riding, hunting, golf, rowing, shooting, skating, swimming, tennis and yachting.<sup>2</sup> Sports became an important element in mid-Victorian women's leisure activities.

In recent literature on the history of women in sport, dress historians have documented changes in materials, structure and styles of sportswear, but have generally left its social and cultural meaning unexamined.<sup>3</sup> Social and sports historians, on the other hand, have failed to accord sufficient recognition to sportswear, which was an important factor capable of improving or hampering women's mobility when they played sport. Sheila Fletcher and Kathleen McCrone, for instance, focus on physical education for women in late nineteenth-century schooling,<sup>4</sup> while the research of Patricia Vertinsky, based on medical writers and the audience at whom they aimed their books and articles, argues that health and exercise were 'central to women's emancipation' in the late nineteenth century, and that the female body was fundamentally a social construction.<sup>5</sup> The work of Jeanne M. Peterson reveals that the Paget gentlewomen paid great attention to their health, and actively engaged in physical activities such as climbing, hiking, skating, swimming, riding, tennis and cycling.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *OED*, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/187476?rskey=TjrwVc&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>> [accessed 10 April 2012] N. F. Anderson, *The Sporting Life: Victorian Sports and Games* (Santa Barbara, CA, 2010), p. 1; M. Huggins, *The Victorians and Sport* (2004), pp. v, 93.

<sup>2</sup> Tennis became a popular sport among middle-class men and women after 1875.

<sup>3</sup> See two special issues on sportswear: *Costume*, 46(2012) & 38(2004); Byrde, *Fashion*, pp. 162-166; P. Cunningham, *English Costume for Sports and Outdoor Recreation from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Centuries* (1969); [Anon.], *The Gallery of English Costume Picture Book Number Eight: Costume for Sport* (Manchester, 1963); Cunningham, *Art*, pp. 136, 188-189.

<sup>4</sup> S. Fletcher, 'The Making and Breaking of A Female Tradition: Women's Physical Education in England, 1880-1980', in J. A. Mangan and R. J. Park (eds.), *From Fair Sex to Feminism: Sport and the Socialization of Women in the Industrial and Post-industrial Eras* (1987), pp. 145-160; idem, *Women First: the Female Tradition in English Physical Education 1880-1980* (1984); K. McCrone, *Sport and the Physical Emancipation of English Women 1870-1914* (1988); idem, 'Play up! Play up! And Play the Game! Sport at the Late Victorian Girl's Public Schools', in Mangan and Park (eds.), *Sport*, pp. 97-129.

<sup>5</sup> P. Vertinsky, *The Eternally Wounded Women: Women, Exercise and Doctors in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester, 1990); idem, 'Body Shapes: the Role of the Medical Establishment in Informing Female Exercise and Physical Education in Nineteenth Century North America', in Mangan and Park (eds.), *Sport*, pp. 256-281.

<sup>6</sup> Peterson, *Victorian Gentlewomen*, pp. 58-63. On climbing dress, see K. Strasdin, "'An Easy Day for A Lady ...': The Dress of Early Women Mountaineers", *Costume*, 38(2004), 72-85.

From a sociological perspective, Jennifer Hargreaves comments that the practice of sport in Victorian times was linked to concepts of the female body and of femininity, with the result that men rather than women were encouraged to play sport. Owing to differences in race, ethnicity, age and disability, how individual women experienced sport varied widely, too.<sup>7</sup> In ‘The Social Construction of Victorian Femininity’, J. A. Mangan analyses the social and cultural evolution that allowed women to engage in sport, and how this altered the ideal of woman, but he neglects to study how mid-Victorian women negotiated their gender identity and interacted with men when playing sports.<sup>8</sup> Exceptionally, the studies of Catherine Horwood explore what the various dress codes reveal about the modesty and insecurities of middle-class men and women in inter-war Britain, and how women had to balance the need for a certain freedom of movement in order to play tennis or swim and the requirement to maintain standards of female modesty in their sportswear.<sup>9</sup> How mid-Victorian middle-class women performed in sports, how sports influenced gender relations, and what sportswear expressed about cultural shifts regarding the female body and female activities have therefore remained largely unclear.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss all of the sports in which mid-Victorian women engaged, and therefore this study focuses on the most fashionable forms of physical exercise for women, analysing the relationship between sports, sportswear and gender in the mid-nineteenth century. The sports included in this chapter have been chosen to represent a range of sports traditionally viewed as female (bathing), male (horse riding, hunting and shooting), and gender-neutral sports (archery, croquet and skating).<sup>10</sup> The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section argues that bathing improved the physical and mental health as well as the moral and corporeal beauty of middle-class women. By the 1860s, there were more women who did not limit

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<sup>7</sup> J. Hargreaves, *Sporting Females: Critical Issues in the History and Sociology of Women's Sports* (1993).

<sup>8</sup> J. A. Mangan, ‘The Social Construction of Victorian Femininity: Emancipation, Education and Exercise’, in idem (ed.), *A Sport-Loving Society: Victorian and Edwardian Middle-Class England at Play* (2006), pp. 135-142.

<sup>9</sup> Horwood, *Appearances*, esp. ch. 5, pp. 75-95; idem, “‘Anyone for Tennis?’: Male Dress and Decorum on the Tennis Courts in Inter-War Britain”, *Costume*, 38(2004), 100-105; idem, ‘Dressing like A Champion: Women’s Tennis Wear in Interwar England’, in Breward et al. (eds.), *Englishness*, pp. 45-60; idem, “‘Girls Who Arouse Dangerous Passions’: Women and Bathing, 1900-39”, *Women's History Review*, 9(2000), 635-673.

<sup>10</sup> The seaside holiday was seen as more of a pastime than a form of physical exercise, and therefore this chapter does not cover these two fashionable activities. On seaside dress, see D. Murphy, “‘The Girls in Green’: Women’s Seaside Dress in England, 1850-1900”, *Costume*, 40(2006), 56-66. Golf did not become popular until the late nineteenth century. Walking, which did not require any entrance fees or much special equipment, was one of the most popular outdoor activities for Victorian women, particularly for the lower classes. On walking dress, see Chapter 1, p. 67.

themselves to passively soaking their bodies in the water, but actively swam, leading to the development of more functional clothes for water activities. The second section, on the other hand, is concerned with how middle-class women negotiated gender tensions when practising male-identified sports such as horse riding, hunting and shooting, and what the development in clothes design for these activities reveals about the social and cultural values surrounding women's participation in them. The final section examines how gender relations were built up in mixed-gender sports such as archery, croquet and skating, which were considered to be a new form of social vehicle through which middle-class women could interact with men, and how women used their dresses and manners to attract potential admirers.

The sources for this chapter are based on 22 sporting manuals taken from the BL, and around 185 articles published in contemporary periodicals drawn from GD, dating from between 1836 and 1876. With a view to developing an understanding of mid-Victorian attitudes to female sporting experience, what women wore and how they behaved, this chapter refers to the diary of English clergyman Francis Kilvert (1840-79), famous for his descriptions of English rural life, as well as to novels, women's letters and enquiries published in periodicals in relation to sport and sportswear. Cartoons offer a strong narrative of contemporary comments on women's participation in sport, and the other sources, including paintings, fashion plates and surviving dresses, also help to paint a broad picture of mid-Victorian sportswear. The reason why this chapter does not include photographs of outdoor activities is that during the mid-Victorian period outdoor photography was not yet well developed and remained costly, and thus was only be affordable for the wealthy. In addition, it was not easy for a photographer to control an animal, particularly for riding and hunting.<sup>11</sup>

### **Bathing Dress and Gender**

The Canadian professor of theatre Patricia Campbell Warner argues that mixed bathing was a social activity which enabled Americans to flirt or court, but, in comparison to America and France, bathing in England discouraged 'social enjoyment' and gender interaction.<sup>12</sup> According to the Baths and Washhouses Act of 1846, washhouses and

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<sup>11</sup> Alison M. David's essay examines riding photographs of Lady Eliza Price Noble Otway (née Campbell) (d. 1910) taken by the celebrity photographer Camille Silvy. A. M. David, 'Elegant Amazons: Victorian Riding Habits and the Fashionable Horsewoman', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 30:1(2002), 179-210.

<sup>12</sup> P. C. Warner, *When the Girls Came Out to Play: the Birth of American Sportswear* (Amherst, MA, 2006), p. 61.

seaside resorts had to have separate areas for each sex.<sup>13</sup> In “‘Stylish yet Perfectly Modest’: Women’s Bathing Dress in England, 1850-1900”, Deirdre Murphy declares, though, that with the introduction of mixed bathing the ‘loose’ and ‘shapeless’ style of female bathing dress developed into a more ‘stylish’ and yet ‘modest’ form.<sup>14</sup> I do not deny that the rise of this new style of bathing dress was partly conditioned by the introduction of mixed bathing, but it should also be remembered that the sexes had bathed together in the Georgian period.<sup>15</sup> This section, therefore, argues not only that bathing improved middle-class women’s physical and mental health as well as their moral and corporeal beauty, but also that the development of a practical style of bathing dress reflected female needs and increased participation in swimming.<sup>16</sup>

Physical activities preserved healthy bones, muscles and joints. The article ‘The Physical Education of Girls’, published by *EDM* in 1873, commented that:

girls to be taught physical exercises while young, not only for the preservation of their health at the time, but also that, when grown older, they may have the strength of body to continue such useful and necessary feats; that health may grow in their well-formed, strong frames, as a fund to be fallen back upon when weakening influences must be combated in womanhood.<sup>17</sup>

The French scholar, historian and social theorist Michel Foucault claimed that ‘one of the primordial forms of class consciousness is the affirmation of the body’, and the American philosopher Judith Butler argues that body is not a ‘mute facticity’, and that there is no ‘natural body’ that pre-exists its cultural inscription.<sup>18</sup> In other words, the body is controlled and regulated by social and cultural values: the Victorians not only admired middle-class women with a healthy, ‘well formed’ body and a ‘strong frame’, but they were also infatuated with the ideals which underlay the healthy body. Physical

<sup>13</sup> C. Love, *A Social History of Swimming in England, 1800-1918: Splashing in the Serpentine* (2008), p. 20. Boys aged over eight had to bathe separately from women.

<sup>14</sup> D. Murphy, “‘Stylish yet Perfectly Modest’: Women’s Bathing Dress in England, 1850-1900”, *Costume*, 38(2004), 63-71.

<sup>15</sup> People had been going to bathe and enjoy seaside holidays since the seventeenth century, but it was only in the mid-Victorian period, because of the expansion of the railway, that they were first able to travel easily to beach resorts such as Blackpool, Brighton, Hastings, Margate, Ramsgate, Worthing and Weymouth. J. Walvin, *Beside the Seaside: A Sociable History of the Popular Seaside Holiday* (1978), chs. 1 & 2. On eighteenth-century bathing dress, see Buck, *Dress*, pp. 100-102.

<sup>16</sup> In the early Victorian period, bathing and swimming were not clearly differentiated. Anderson states that the English use of the word bathing included both swimming and washing. Anderson, *Sporting*, p. 72.

<sup>17</sup> F. Fenwick-Miller, ‘The Physical Education of Girls’, *EDM*, 1 October 1873, Issue 106, p. 182, GD:DX1901421066.

<sup>18</sup> M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York, 1978), trans. by R. Hurley, p. 126; S. Salih, ‘On Judith Butler and Performativity’, in K. E. Lovaas and M. M. Jenkins (eds.), *Sexualities and Communication in Everyday Life: A Reader* (2007), pp. 55- 67(p. 55). Horwood argues that, because health became more important than modesty during the interwar period, women could enjoy swimming and sunbathing, and their ‘body could be seen as a reflection of health instead of purely as an object of sex’. Horwood, ‘Girls Who Arouse Dangerous Passions’, p. 667.

health implied female fertility, which was an essential part of womanhood. Sickly girls were thought to be unqualified for marriage, as without a certain degree of stamina and physical strength, women could be in danger when delivering a baby, not to mention when breastfeeding or carrying an infant in their arms.<sup>19</sup> Sheila Ryan Johansson comments that ‘pregnancy and childbirth were taxing and hazardous processes [...] particularly when repeated year after year. But they were more likely to damage the health of a woman than to be the immediate cause of her death’.<sup>20</sup>

A healthy body was also a signifier of morality in women. Women who were sick or weak were considered to be ‘morally wrong’, because physical strength was also ‘a religious duty’.<sup>21</sup> The American Unitarian Universalist preacher Edwin Hubbell Chapin (1814-80) argued that:

she [a young woman] lacks the necessary strength to do her share of the work at hand, whether at home or among the poor, and her judgment becomes increasingly warped by her own concerns. She becomes, in short, immoral and a burden.<sup>22</sup>

The ideal female body therefore had to be a healthy one, as it was only when a woman was in possession of good health that she was able to help her family and others. The concept of the ‘Angel in the House’ did not mean that a woman was entirely limited to the domestic sphere, and indeed an ideal woman would go out to shop for her family, to help the poor and to do exercise in order to keep healthy. On the contrary, an unhealthy body would prevent her from performing the role of the angel-like philanthropist, and it was therefore immoral for a woman to be unhealthy and thus a burden on her family. Doing exercise was therefore a responsibility for the Victorian middle-class woman.

Bathing, too, was a moral duty, and one which brought with it cleanliness and health. Through sea bathing, people could benefit from the fresh sea air and water, though extremes of heat or overcrowded seaside resorts could also cause certain

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<sup>19</sup> On health as a prerequisite for marriage, see P. Jalland, *Women, Marriage and Politics 1860-1914* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 84-87. A wealthy woman could hire a wet nurse to take care of her children. On sports in relation to American motherhood, see C. Smith-Rosenberg and C. Rosenberg, ‘The Female Animal: Medical and Biological Views of Women and Their Role in Nineteenth-Century America’, in Mangan and Park (eds.), *Sport*, pp. 13-37; A. Chisholm, ‘Nineteenth-Century Gymnastics for U.S. Women and Incorporations of Buoyancy: Contouring Femininity, Shaping Sex, and Regulating Middle-Class Consumption’, *Journal of Women’s History*, 20:3(2008), 84-122(pp. 86-104).

<sup>20</sup> S. R. Johansson, ‘Sex and Death in Victorian England: An Examination of Age- and Sex-Specific Death Rates, 1840-1910’, in M. Vicinus (ed.), *A Widening Sphere: Changing Roles of Victorian Women* (1977), pp. 163-181(p. 170).

<sup>21</sup> Nancy Theberge has commented that, in a patriarchal society, Victorian women’s participation in sports was constrained by ‘the myth of female frailty’, namely that ‘women were morally and spiritually strong but physically and intellectually weak’. N. Theberge, ‘Women’s Athletics and the Myth of Female Frailty’, in J. Freeman (ed.), *Women: A Feminist Perspective* (1989), 4<sup>th</sup> edn., pp. 507-522(p. 507).

<sup>22</sup> Cited in F. B. Cogan, *All-American Girl: the Ideal of Real Womanhood in Mid-Nineteenth Century America* (1988), p. 32.

diseases. It was therefore recommended to bathe in the early morning, as this had a ‘wonderful’ effect on the spirits, and gave an appetite for breakfast. The body, though, could be weakened if it had gone without food for many hours, and so others believed that the best time might be between eleven and one, as ‘the water by that time has been warmed by the sun, and the morning breeze calmed down’. A bath by moonlight could also make it easier for the bather to have a sound and refreshing sleep.<sup>23</sup>

It was also believed that there was no beauty without health.<sup>24</sup> Exercise brightened the eyes, purified the complexion and maintained physical fitness, though it is true that sunburn or swarthy skin was unappreciated, because it was a sign of the working class. As Ariel Beaujot notes, ‘in the age of Darwin, science could justify linking skin colour with the ‘civilising’ practices of imperial rule. It was imperative that women, especially, maintained their pale skin tone because they were highlighted as representatives of the British race’.<sup>25</sup> In *Beautiful for Ever* (1863), Sarah Rachel Levison (born c. 1806) argued that bathing was essential to health and beauty, especially in the case of the Arabian medicated bath.<sup>26</sup> She warned that women who had asthma or heart disease should avoid the Turkish bath, with its transitions from hot to cold and from cold to hot.<sup>27</sup> A warm bath, on the other hand, which increased circulation on the surface of the body, reinforced women’s health and strength, while a cold bath, which could cause a cold, was considered inappropriate.<sup>28</sup> This could be one of the reasons why swimming, which often took place in cold water, was regarded as a man’s sport until the middle of the nineteenth century.

By the 1860s, the loose female bathing gown had been replaced by a more comfortable and functional two-piece dress: a belted tunic with long trousers reaching down to the ankle. In 1873, *Cassell’s* noted that the former style of bathing dress:

was apt to dab wet and flabby against the bather as she left the water, and cause a chill. The very greatest objection of all was that occasionally the air filled it, or the wind caught it, as the bather rose above the surface of the waves, and bore it up above the crest of the water like a balloon.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> G. Forrest, *A Handbook of Swimming and Skating* (1858), p. 17; ‘Swimming for Ladies’, *EDM*, 1 July 1873, Issue 103, p. 28, GD:DX1901420989.

<sup>24</sup> ‘While Beauty requires the presence of Health, Health does not absolutely imply the presence of Beauty’. R. Dick, *The Connexion of Health and Beauty* (1857), p. 8. On health as a part of beauty, see Ribeiro, *Facing Beauty*, p. 238.

<sup>25</sup> A. Beaujot, “‘The Beauty of her Hands’: the Glove and the Making of the Middle-Class Body”, in Goggin and Tobin (eds.), *Material Women*, pp. 167-184 (p. 168).

<sup>26</sup> S. R. Levison, *Beautiful for Ever* (1863), p. 22.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>28</sup> ‘The Boudoir’, *LC*, 1 March 1852, p. 122, GD:DX1902058349.

<sup>29</sup> *Cassell’s*, p. 216.



This implies that by wearing such an old-fashioned bathing gown, women could not move freely in the water, and might easily catch a cold. It was, however, considered necessary for early Victorian women to maintain their morality, given that a loose gown hid the shape of the body, and a tightly-boned dress hampered mobility. The female body could not, though, be hidden by a loose gown when wet, and such indecent exposure probably resulted in the laws against mixed bathing. As Christopher Love clearly points out, the Town Police Clauses Act, 1847, Clause 69 “required local authorities operating public bathing places to set limits on the areas where both men and women were allowed to bath, with adequate distance between the two areas so that there would be no ‘indecent exposure’ of the bathers”.<sup>30</sup>

*The Art of Swimming in the Eton Style* (1875) by ‘Sergeant Leahy’, on the other hand, declared that:

ladies in their bathing dresses are much more buoyant in the water than persons with nothing on them but bathing drawers. This I account for from the flow of water, more or less, through the bathing dresses and because they can stand the coldness of the water better than those who have no clothes on [...] the bathing dress keeps out the repeated cold shocks that the naked body has to incur.<sup>31</sup>

For him, bathing dress protected women from drowning and from catching a cold, as compared with those who did not wear bathing clothes. Whereas most of the female body had to be covered, men often bathed naked, or were advised to wear only a pair of drawers.<sup>32</sup> John Travis argues that bathing dress prevented men from receiving the full benefit of salt water on their skin, and suggests that Englishmen viewed bathing drawers as a sign of effeminacy.<sup>33</sup> Francis Kilvert, for example, was famous for his opposition to wearing drawers for water exercise.<sup>34</sup> This shows the differences between fundamental morality for each sex during the Victorian period.

Changes in female bathing dress took place mainly because the mid-Victorian period saw women allowed to practise active water exercise, namely swimming. The article ‘The Health and Physical Development of Girls’, published by *LT* in 1864, stated that:

<sup>30</sup> 10 & 11 Vict., c. 89, clause 69, cited in Love, *Swimming*, p. 21.

<sup>31</sup> Cited in Cunningham, *Sports*, p. 277. On men’s swimwear, see R. Rutt, ‘The Englishman’s Swimwear’, *Costume*, 24(1990), 69-84.

<sup>32</sup> Only in the Edwardian period did it become necessary for men to wear a bathing suit. Ribeiro, *Morality*, p. 134.

<sup>33</sup> J. Travis, ‘Continuity and Change in English Sea-Bathing 1730-1900: A Case of Swimming with the Tide’, in S. Fisher (ed.), *Recreation and the Sea* (Exeter, 1997), pp. 8-35(p. 13).

<sup>34</sup> J. K. Walton, *The English Seaside Resort: A Social History 1750-1914* (Leicester, 1983), p. 192.

[swimming] may be as useful in an emergency as a great deal, if it gives those few moments of self-possession amid danger which will commonly keep a person from drowning until assistance comes. Women are naturally as well fitted for swimming as men.<sup>35</sup>

By learning to swim, a woman could at least save herself in an emergency. In 1871, *JB* declared that:

swimming should be taught to girls as a branch of national education. [...] We might have a healthier, more self-reliant, and robust race of girls and women than our philosophers who write and discourse on the degeneration of British race tell us we now possess.<sup>36</sup>

Once swimming was being promoted in order to combat poor health in women, more functional dresses for learning and practising swimming were required, and this led to the old style of bathing gown going out of fashion. 'Swimming for Ladies', published by *EDM* in 1873, reminded its readers that 'in order to swim properly it is necessary that the arms and legs should be perfectly free, so that all the muscles may have full play'. Any tightness would entail discomfort, and the waist had to be at least three or four inches larger than in an ordinary dress. A proper swimming dress had to be simple, as any ornamentation would cling around the hands and legs and impede movement.<sup>37</sup> Long sleeves were, however, in accordance with modesty, and protected the wearer from the sun, though short sleeves were also adopted, as they did not hinder arm movement.<sup>38</sup> The sailor's collar, which was stylish but 'childish', was only worn by young women.<sup>39</sup>

English modesty was preserved by the use of the bathing machine, a small construction mounted on wheels in which Englishwomen changed into their bathing dresses and then walked directly into the water. In the absence of a bathing machine, Englishwomen were recommended to cover themselves with a wrap until they got into the water, and to do the same again when coming out.<sup>40</sup> In France, instead of machines,

<sup>35</sup> 'The Health and Physical Development of Girls', *LT*, 1 November 1864, p. 342, GD:DX1901523566; W. F. Taylor, *Suitable Bathing Dress* (Windsor, 1864), p. 1. According to Parliament records from 1870, '23,000 deaths from drowning had occurred during the last five years in England and Wales alone'. E. Goldsmid, *The Bath and the Beach* (1870), p. 21.

<sup>36</sup> 'Social Bathing (from *Bathing Chronicle*)', *JB*, 26 August 1871, Issue, 2,646, GD:DX1900565375.

<sup>37</sup> 'Swimming for Ladies', GD:DX1901420989.

<sup>38</sup> 'Description of the Mermaid Bathing Costume', *Myra's*, 1 June 1875, Issue 5, p. 4, GD:DX1900859549.

<sup>39</sup> *Cassell's*, p. 216. Avril Lansdell declared, however, that the sailor collar offered a 'modesty' piece to cover the upper chest. Lansdell, *Seaside*, p. 33. In 1846, Queen Victoria ordered a sailor suit for the four-year-old Prince of Wales, whereupon it soon became popular for both boys and girls. J. Craik, *Fashion: the Key Concepts* (Oxford, 2009), p. 59.

<sup>40</sup> 'Sea Bathing Abroad', *Pall Mall Gazette* (1865-unknown), 19 August 1869, Issue 1,410, GD:BA3200306392.

a row of buildings on the shore allowed bathers to undress and dress, and Frenchwomen were used to walking across the sand to the water, without a wrap. This could be one of the reasons why the French bathing dress was considered more pretty and modest than the English one. Patricia Campbell Warner, though, makes the point that Englishwomen were more relaxed in their skirtless swimming dresses, while Americans clung to their additional layers of skirt and stockings.<sup>41</sup> This reflected the fact that, without male swimmers, Englishwomen had more freedom to enjoy swimming: they would not be stared at, did not need to wear a long skirt to hide their drawers, and did not have to worry about showing off their bare legs and arms.<sup>42</sup> This supports my view that the changes in female bathing and swimming dresses came about mainly because women themselves became active participants in water exercise.

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Fig. 6-1 The Bathing Dress, *LF*, 1 August 1869, Issue 275, GD:DX1901608159.

Fig. 6-2 The Swimming Dress (1870-75), MCG:1947.2842.

Most clothes for water activities were made in blue, black or other dark shades of woollen materials such as serge, flannel and merino, and were trimmed in scarlet (Figure 6-1).<sup>43</sup> White seemed to be fashionable, but it could lead to scandal, particularly

<sup>41</sup> Warner, *When the Girls Came Out to Play*, p. 68.

<sup>42</sup> 'Sea Bathing Abroad', GD:BA3200306392.

<sup>43</sup> 'The Fashions', *EDM*, 1 September 1863, Issue 41, p. 237, GD:DX1901417799; 'Spinnings in Town', *Ibid.*, 1 July 1874, Issue 115, p. 35, GD:DX1901422846; 'Description of the Fashions and Needlework Engravings', *Ibid.*, 1 August 1875, Issue 184/128, p. 102, GD:DX1902130714. On sporting fabrics, see F. Anderson, 'This Sporting Cloth: Tweed, Gender and Fashion 1860-1900', *Textile History*, 37:2(2006), 166-186.

once mixed swimming had become more common.<sup>44</sup> A light-coloured swimming dress would become translucent or even transparent when wet, showing off the wearer's body. In 1873, *Cassell's* commented that brown was 'not a bad colour for female bathing dresses'.<sup>45</sup> A swimming dress, belonging to MCG (Figure 6-2), for example, is made of brown alpaca trimmed with red braid. Though brown might not highlight female attractiveness, it was a durable colour, and in any case bathing and swimming in mid-Victorian times often took place in single-gender spaces. Moreover, the oiled silk cap was considered to be an indispensable accessory for female bathers and swimmers, so that they could keep their hair clean and away from the salt water.<sup>46</sup> It was in any case inappropriate for women to show their loose, wet hair in the public sphere. Though the statement might once more be attributable to the practice of gender segregation, 'Swimming for Ladies' suggested, nevertheless, that caps were not necessary:

they [caps] may be left to discretion of the wearer. Sea-water seldom injures the hair; indeed, many people find it benefits from the friction of rubbing it dry. Those, however, who are particular, can rinse the hair in fresh water afterwards. Wetting the head prevents headaches, generally caused (in this case) by the blood rushing to the head, or the feet being wet.<sup>47</sup>

Last but not least, a pair of slippers or sandals protected the feet from the shingle. The objective of doing exercise was to keep women healthy, and so women's sportswear and accessories had above all to protect them.

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<sup>44</sup> 'Description of Engraving', *LF*, 1 August 1870, Issue 287, GD:DX1901608332.

<sup>45</sup> *Cassell's*, p. 217.

<sup>46</sup> 'Description of the Fashions and Needlework Engravings', *EDM*, 1 August 1870, Issue 68/5, p. 115, GD:DX1901422396.

<sup>47</sup> 'Swimming for Ladies', GD:DX1901420989.

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Fig. 6-3 Mixed Bathing in Bo-long, *Punch*, 7 July 1855, Issue 730, GD:DX1901537346.

By the 1860s, a few places in England offered mixed bathing for members of the same family, but in general terms it was not countenanced until the end of the century.<sup>48</sup> A cartoon from *Punch* (1855) (Figure 6-3) depicted an image of sea bathing in Bo-long, France, where ‘Old Dipps declares that they manage sea-bathing better in France, and that when he is at Bo-long, he does as Bo-long does well! That’s a matter of taste’.<sup>49</sup> This indicates that the English were not used to mixed bathing, which was thought distasteful in England, and it also reveals that some Englishmen might be keen to take part in mixed bathing, given that ‘Old Dipps’ made the comment that French sea bathing was ‘better’. Another cartoon, from *Fun* (1862) (Figure 6-4) described it thus:

when you bathe at Boulogne, you should always take care to secure a bathing costume such as is usually worn by your sex. Last season poor Bodger, who didn’t know the difference, walked off with his wife’s costume, while she retained his. It was bad enough for him, but what must it have been for her?<sup>50</sup>

This makes fun of the fact that, because of the existence of mixed bathing at Boulogne in France, which was an attractive seaside resort for the English in the nineteenth century, ‘Bodger’ had the opportunity to mistake his wife’s bathing dress for his own costume: it was of course immoral to cross-dress in the Victorian period, not to mention

<sup>48</sup> Walton, *Seaside*, p. 192. Bexhill was one of the first resorts to allow mixed bathing, in 1901. *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>49</sup> *Punch*, 7 July 1855, Issue 730, GD:DX1901537346.

<sup>50</sup> ‘Bathing at Boulogne’, *Fun*, 23 April 1862, p. 228, GD:DX1901459762.

the fact that the upper part of his wife's body was probably naked, given that men often wore only drawers. These illustrations show that English bathing customs avoided interaction between the sexes.

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Fig. 6-4 'Bathing at Boulogne', *Fun*, 23 April 1862, p. 228, GD:DX1901459762.

In spite of the prevalence of single-sex bathing, women had to dress properly in any case, because men might take the opportunity to peek at female bathing practices. For example, in 1874, a diary entry by Francis Kilvert described a scene from Broadstairs, where 'the lady who delights in swimming to the head of the pier with her nude and whiskered friend upon her back'.<sup>51</sup> In July 1875, Kilvert again recorded another instance on the Isle of Wight:

one beautiful girl stood entirely naked on the sand, and there as she sat, half reclined sideways, leaning upon her elbow with her knee bent and her legs and feet partly drawn back and up, she was a model for a sculptor, there was a supple slender waist, the gentle dawn and tender swell of the bosom and the budding breast, the graceful rounding of the delicately beautiful limbs and above all the soft exquisite curves of the rosy dimpled bottom and broad white thighs.<sup>52</sup>

Whether or not it was Kilvert's intention to study naked female bathers, these diaries show that the seaside was perfectly capable of giving rise to sexual or erotic scandal. To

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<sup>51</sup> Cited in Walton, *Seaside*, p. 192.

<sup>52</sup> Cited in Walvin, *Seaside*, p. 70.



maintain her reputation, a respectable middle-class woman would certainly not bathe or swim naked. In conducting the research for this chapter, I did not find a single document or illustration that depicts a female bather peeping at a male while he was engaged in nude bathing. Perhaps it did happen, of course, but it was too lewd a subject to mention in print. It is, therefore, difficult to establish whether mid-Victorian Englishwomen themselves preferred to bathe or swim in mixed-gender or women-only spaces, but it is clear from mid-Victorian norms that mixed bathing was disapproved of by the wider public. Bathing was above all an occasion for mid-Victorian women to bond together, to socialise freely and to improve their morality, health and beauty, and the new form of bathing dress certainly provided women with greater freedom to enjoy water activities.

### **Riding and Hunting Dress and Negotiating Gender**

In the medieval and early modern period, horse riding, hunting and shooting were considered to be field sports played by aristocratic or elite men, but by the eighteenth century, elite women were also allowed to take part in field sports.<sup>53</sup> From the 1850s onwards, growing numbers of middle-class women also engaged in such elite recreations, but blood sports, like hunting and shooting, were in some way still thought of as male territory.<sup>54</sup> This section focuses therefore on how middle-class female riders, hunters and shooters negotiated the gender tensions between the traditional images of passive, submissive women and the new sporting woman, and on social and cultural reactions to the increased prevalence of female riding, hunting and shooting clothes.<sup>55</sup>

Before the Victorian period, horse riding had been recommended as physical training for both sexes.<sup>56</sup> *The Habits of Good Society* (1859) stated that through horse

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<sup>53</sup> P. Borsay, *A History of Leisure: The British Experience since 1500* (Basingstoke, 2006), pp. 190-120; R. Grassby, 'Decline of Falconry in Early Modern England', *Past and Present*, 157:1(1997), 37-62(p. 49); R. B. Manning, *Hunters and Poachers: A Cultural and Social History of Unlawful Hunting in England, 1485-1640* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 5, 194; T. McLean, *The English at Play in the Middle Ages* (Windsor, 1983), pp. 50-56. 'People from high society partially escaped criticism by being more open to women's activity'. J. Riordan and A. Kruger (eds.), *European Cultures in Sports Examining the Nations and Regions* (Bristol, 2003), p. 108.

<sup>54</sup> Anderson, *Sporting*, p. 120.

<sup>55</sup> 'Hunting usually meant the pursuit on horseback of animal prey, often accompanied with hunting dogs. Shooting was a sport on foot, most commonly to kill game birds, also often with the aid of dogs'. Anderson, *Sporting*, pp. 1-2. In 1860, the sporting writer Donald Walker declared that riding, hunting and shooting were manly sports. D. Walker, *Walker's Manly Exercises: Containing Rowing, Sailing, Riding, Driving, Racing, Hunting, Shooting, and Other Manly Sports* (1860).

<sup>56</sup> D. Walker, *Exercise for Ladies; Calculated to Preserve and Improve Beauty and to Prevent and Correct Personal Defects, Inseparable from Constrained or Careless Habits: Found on Physiological Principles* (1836), p. 66; 'The Health and Physical Development of Girls', *LT*, 1 November 1864, p. 342, GD:DX1901523566.

riding women could acquire 'health with delicacy', which was 'the true charm feminine *physique*'.<sup>57</sup> Horse riding helped middle-class women to strengthen their limbs and shape their figure, distinguishing it from both a manly muscular body and the rough body of a poor woman, though it was also believed that overdoing horse riding could destroy feminine beauty, leading to phenomena such as the enlargement of the waist, the deformation of the limbs and the loss of a delicate complexion.<sup>58</sup> Most importantly, Victorian Englishwomen did not ride like men, sitting astride a horse, as it was seen as immoral for women to sit across a horse with their legs spread open. Nancy Fix Anderson argues that 'the sexual fears such images evoked made the more dangerous and uncomfortable sidesaddle mandatory'.<sup>59</sup> *Exercise for Ladies* by Donald Walker (1836) declared that the side saddle reinforced women's dependence on men, as the rider had to have a gentleman available to place her on the saddle, while a groom held the horse.<sup>60</sup> In addition, *The Habits of Good Society* declared that to protect her from danger and scandal, a woman should never ride out without a gentleman or a groom, but that he should 'not be young and single unless he were a very intimate friend'.<sup>61</sup>

However, it was not until the late 1860s that women who were fond of hunting or who wore spurs might not be considered to be 'fast' or 'unladylike'.<sup>62</sup> In 1868, a twelve year-old reader of *EDM* 'Hunter' declared that she had been hunting since the age of five, and that she also took part in rowing, riding and swimming, and was very healthy.<sup>63</sup> With improvements in female health, women came increasingly to take part in outdoor physical activities. In 1875, another reader called 'Beatrice' wrote that many English girls accompanied their fathers and brothers to the Highlands for grouse shooting, revealing that some men did accept females taking part in shooting.<sup>64</sup> A letter from the British actress and author Frances Kemble (1809-93) to her friend Arthur, on 27 November 1875, recorded such activities:

for you have become my children's friend as well as mine, and we all take part in the success of the grouse shooting, and whatever may be your plans for the winter.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *Good Society*, p. 186.

<sup>58</sup> Walker, *Ladies*, p. 66.

<sup>59</sup> Anderson, *Sporting*, p. 34.

<sup>60</sup> Walker, *Ladies*, p. 206.

<sup>61</sup> *Good Society*, p. 196.

<sup>62</sup> 'The Englishwoman's conversazione', *EDM*, 1 July 1868, Issue 43, p. 53, GD:DX1901421309; *Ibid.*, 1 April 1869, Issue 52, p. 221, GD:1901421597.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 August 1868, Issue 44, p. 109, GD:DX1901421334.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 March 1875, Issue 179/123, p. 65, GD:DX1902130425.

<sup>65</sup> F. A. Kemble, *Further Records 1848-1883: A Series of Letters* (1891), p. 357, B&I:S4850-D234.

That is to say, grouse shooting, which was a particularly fashionable sport in Scotland, could be regarded as a pleasurable activity to be shared by family members and friends. Alastair J. Durie argues that blood sports were revived by Victoria and Albert's promotion of the sporting culture of the Scottish Highlands.<sup>66</sup> A conversation from a cartoon published in *Punch* in 1875, 'To Girls Who Walk with the Guns', made fun of the young woman, Ethel, asking her uncle whether he was 'going to shoot today uncle?' Uncle replied 'not if you are. When I was young the man shot the birds and the women stayed at home to cook them!'<sup>67</sup> This shows the change in women's lives in mid-Victorian times, with many women taking a much more active part in hunting and shooting than their mothers and grandmothers had done. In the same year, on the other hand, the memoir of the author and traveller Lady Isabel Arundell Burton (1831-96) stated that:

as regards shooting, I do not like to kill any small, useless, or harmless thing, but only what is needed for eating, or large game, when the beast will kill you if you do not kill it. I cannot bear to see a gazelle hunted; I dislike the Hurlingham pigeon matches, and the *battu* slaughters in England, the mangled, quivering heaps of half-slain hares and rabbits, upon which I have seen even girls look unmoved. It is all a matter of habit; but this is not my idea of 'sport'.<sup>68</sup>

Some Victorian women might, like Lady Burton, have disliked such blood sports unless they were necessary. However, *EDM* (1871) declared that 'hunting' in England meant the pursuit of certain animals, mainly the fox and the hare, 'with hounds that hunt by the scent'. This was different from other cultures, where all manner of weapons were used to pursue all kinds of wild animals.<sup>69</sup> Hunting was not, of course, entirely violent in nature, but also involved skill, and this could explain why Englishwomen started to be allowed to hunt.

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<sup>66</sup> A. J. Durie, *Scotland for the Holiday: Tourism in Scotland, c. 1780-1939* (East Linton, 2003), p. 115.

<sup>67</sup> "To Girls Who 'Walk with the Guns'", *Punch*, 27 November 1875, p. 217, GD:DX1901932650.

<sup>68</sup> I. A. Burton, *The Inner Life of Syria, Palestine, and the Holy Land: from My Private Journal, Vol. 1* (1875), pp. 280-281, B&I:S4418-D020. Her father Hon. Henry Raymond Arundell (1799-1886) was a lineal descendant of the sixth Baron Arundell of Wardour, and her mother Eliza was the sister of Robert Tolver Gerard (1808-87), the thirteenth Baronet of Bryn Lancashire and the first Baron Gerard of Bryn. Her husband, Sir Richard Francis Burton (1821-90), was an explorer, adventurer and writer.

<sup>69</sup> 'An Old Whip', 'Hunting in England- in two parts- I', *EDM*, 1 October 1871, Issue 82, p. 210, GD:DX1901422092.

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Fig. 6-5 “Hunting Sketches, by ‘PHIZ’ - No. 3”, *Sporting Gazette*, 6 April 1867, Issue 232, p. 268, GD:DX1900434226.

When taking part in field sports, women did, however, have to maintain the ideology of femininity. In the illustration ‘Hunting’, from the *Sporting Gazette* of 1867 (Figure 6-5), the women hunter tries to encourage the gentleman to follow her, but he is exhausted and says that “you’re a very nice young woman, but I’m not a ‘follower’ of your’n”.<sup>70</sup> Such a woman rode in front of her potential admirer, signifying that she was a disobedient and intractable woman, and Victorian men did not attempt to follow women riders because they were used to being considered the leader or decision-maker in their lives, and not women. As Jeanne Peterson notes, on the subject of Victorian gender stereotypes:

there was a man in charge and an angel in the house; he led, she followed, he was active, she was passive, he was strong and she was weak, he took care of public life and she of the private sphere.<sup>71</sup>

In *Daniel Deronda* (1876), by George Eliot, the sporty and imperious heroine Gwendolen Harleth, who enjoyed horse riding, hunting and archery, laughs and rides off when her admirer Rex Gascoigne is injured in a riding accident while following her

<sup>70</sup> ‘Hunting’, *Sporting Gazette*, 6 April 1867, Issue 232, p. 268, GD:DX1900434226.

<sup>71</sup> Peterson, *Victorian Gentlewomen*, p. x.

on a fox hunt.<sup>72</sup> This again reveals how active and dashing women hunters destroyed the idea of female gentility and challenged Victorian social and gender roles.<sup>73</sup>

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Fig. 6-6 'Delightful Prospect; or Matrimony and Fox-Hunting', *Punch*, 27 November 1869, p. 217, GD:DX1901562917.

Women hunters or shooters had to strike a balance between not being competitive, but being competent riders. The satire published in *Punch* (1869), 'Delightful Prospect; or Matrimony and Fox-Hunting' (Figure 6-6), portrayed the experience of a newly-married couple hunting together. Though 'Mr Scrimmage' wanted his wife to go back, she answered 'no, I am not half tired yet; and you can open all the gates for me'.<sup>74</sup> This shows that 'Mrs Scrimmage' lacked riding skills, and was a burden for her husband because he had to open the gates for her.<sup>75</sup> This could be why she does not feel tired, but her lack of skill probably slowed down her husband's hunting trip and spoilt his enjoyment. Moreover, male hunters often complained that

<sup>72</sup> G. Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (2010), p. 54. The story was first published in 1876, and it is set in late 1865.

<sup>73</sup> By taking part in horse riding, hunting or shooting, women could be seen as in pursuit of a prospective partner. Huggins, *Sport*, p. 81. Fox hunting brought Gwendolen and the wealthy and manipulative man Henleigh Mallinger Grandcourt together, but their marriage was not successful. Barbara Hardy declares that Gwendolen and Grandcourt regarded their marriage as a variant of horse riding - 'the self in the role of rider and the other in the role of horse'. Cited in H. Bloom (ed.), *George Eliot* (Pennsylvania, 2003), p. 163; B. Hardy, *The Novels of George Eliot: A Study in Form* (1959), p. 228.

<sup>74</sup> *Punch*, 27 November 1869, p. 217, GD:DX1901562917.

<sup>75</sup> Riding a horse or using a shotgun required sophisticated skills, as otherwise it could cause fatal injury. This could be one of the reasons why men opposed women riding, hunting and shooting.

women talked too much while hunting, and that when women hunters had trouble: ‘men had to stop their own chase to help them’; ‘they [women] want equality but did not do their fair share by, for example, keeping a gate open to men behind them at the start of the hunt’.<sup>76</sup> This seems to suggest that men rejected female hunters because they lacked hunting skills, but it was also the case that a woman who was over-active in field sports was considered to have lost her gender identity. Women hunters or shooters had to be above all a cooperative companion of their menfolk, and this perspective was also expressed in women’s riding dress: the fact that their trousers had to be hid by a skirt reminded women that they had to watch their conduct.

From the 1850s onwards, a significant number of contemporary periodicals and advertisements introduced the riding dress to middle-class women, indicating that horse riding had become or at very least was being promoted as a fashionable female activity. Since the seventeenth century, riding clothes for elite women had copied those of men, and were made by tailors.<sup>77</sup> The reason for this could be because women’s dress was delicate and lacked mobility, and therefore female riding dresses tended to express a certain degree of masculinity.<sup>78</sup> In mid-Victorian times, fashionable riding dresses were often cut in a simple style, with a close-fitting jacket bodice and a long skirt and an invisible pair of trousers. Trousers offered women more freedom to ride and protected their modesty and morality, but women wearing trousers was considered likely to lead to ‘male anxiety that women could easily undermine their rightful power’.<sup>79</sup> In the mixed-gender public sphere, therefore, trousers had to be invisible: they were an important garment for the construction and expression of gender in the Victorian social and cultural context, and mid-Victorian female riding dresses had to present female features.

Riding dresses were generally made out of warm, durable, waterproof, plain woollen materials, whether of cloth, serge or cashmere: the most fashionable colours were black, dark blue, dark brown, dark green and grey.<sup>80</sup> John Harvey argues that

<sup>76</sup> E. Griffin, *Blood Sport: Hunting in Britain since 1066* (2007), p. 166; Anderson, *Sporting*, p. 122.

<sup>77</sup> J. Arnold, ‘Dashing Amazons: the Development of Women’s Riding Dress, c. 1500-1900’, in A. de la Haye and E. Wilson (eds.), *Defining Dress: Dress as Object, Meaning, and Identity* (Manchester, 1999), pp. 10-29 (p. 16). Buck argued that it was not uncommon for women riders to wear men’s clothes and hats in the early eighteenth century. Buck, *Dress*, p. 52. On eighteenth-century riding dress, see *Ibid.*, pp. 52-54, 160. On tailor-made dress, see Aldrich, ‘Tailors’ Cutting Manuals’.

<sup>78</sup> S. D. Barney, *Clothes and the Horse: A Guide to Correct Dress for All Riding Occasions* (1953), with A Historical Introduction by J. Laver, p. 22.

<sup>79</sup> A. Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (1995), p. 68.

<sup>80</sup> ‘The London and Paris Fashions’, *LN*, 26 March 1853, Issue 326, p. 192, GD:DX1900462020; *Ibid.*, 22 July 1854, Issue 395, p. 36, GD:DX1900465202; *Ibid.*, 14 July 1860, Issue 707, p. 20,

‘strong, dark and earthy colours... were the absolute and deliberate antithesis to notions of conventional sartorial femininity associated with lace, fine silks, delicate *appliqués*, soft, or light fabrics’.<sup>81</sup> However, this does not mean that riding dresses destroyed the femininity of riders: in one of Kilvert’s diaries, in 1870, he wrote that ‘the Miller’s daughter [...] dressed in a dark riding habit [...] and a black jaunty pretty hat with a black feather’, implying that the sight of such a riding outfit induced him to record it.<sup>82</sup> Another example, in *Daniel Deronda*, states that ‘Gwendolen always felt the more daring for being in her riding-dress; beside having the agreeable belief that she looked as well as possible in it’.<sup>83</sup> Her admirer Rex also made the comment that:

she had never looked so lovely before: her figure, her long white throat, and the curves of her cheek and chin were always set off to perfection by the compact simplicity of her riding dress. He could not conceive a more perfect girl.<sup>84</sup>

It seems clear that the simplicity of riding dress accentuated women’s prettiness, and produced an eye-catching effect.

In the 1860s, the French critic Hippolyte Taine claimed that female Britons always dressed badly, with only two exceptions: ‘the riding habit, close fitting to torso, simple and without ornament, denoting boldness, agility, strength, physical well-being; and the travelling costume, the small straw hat with a single ribbon, the one-piece without odd additions, the low boots made of good leather’.<sup>85</sup> In 1868, the editor of *EDM* declared that, as hunting was now popular in France, the French had become interested in the elegance of English riding dress.<sup>86</sup> This implies that riding dresses were used for hunting, and it also seems to suggest that riding dresses were essentially an English invention. James Laver claimed that tailor-made riding dresses were the ‘English contribution to the development of women’s fashions’, and that this had affected not only ordinary women’s clothes but also female sportswear.<sup>87</sup>

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GD:DX1900486729; *Ibid.*, 13 September 1862, Issue 820, p. 162, GD:DX1900493059; ‘The Englishwoman’s Conversation’, *EDM*, 1 April 1868, Issue 40, p. 221, GD:DX1901419186; *Ibid.*, 1 July 1869, Issue 55, p. 41, GD:DX1901421685.

<sup>81</sup> Cited in L. Taylor, ‘Wool Cloth and Gender: The Use of Woollen Cloth in Women’s Dress in Britain, 1865-85’, in Haye and Wilson (eds.), *Defining*, pp. 30-47(p. 38).

<sup>82</sup> Cited in Cunningham, *Sports*, p. 120.

<sup>83</sup> Eliot, *Deronda*, p. 242.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>85</sup> Taine, *Notes*, p. 56. Gloves and a hat were required for riding, in order to maintain a pale complexion, gentility and morality. *The Habits of Good Society* also argued that ‘it [a hat] permits the free circulation of air around the face, while it protects the eyes, the forehead, and almost the chin, from scorching heat or withering blasts’. *Good Society*, p. 186.

<sup>86</sup> ‘The Fashions’, *EDM*, 1 December 1868, Issue 48, p. 307, GD:DX1901421436.

<sup>87</sup> Barney, *Clothes*, p. 23.



Contemporary magazines advised that, in the absence of a riding dress, women could wear a walking dress instead.<sup>88</sup> Similarly, a riding dress could also be worn for visiting or travelling. Women who could afford a tailor-made riding dress were often considered to be rich enough to order more dresses for each particular function, in any case, though many readers of the periodicals tended to exchange their riding dresses for something else. For example, one enquiry from *EDM* (1868) expressed the wish to have a hand-sewing machine in exchange for a six-guinea black cloth riding habit, which is ‘almost new’, and in another enquiry, the reader ‘Iris’ wanted to dispose of her ‘nearly quite new’ and ‘beautiful’, dark-coloured, ‘very fine’, London-made cloth riding habit, which had cost ten guineas and had been worn only two or three times.<sup>89</sup> This might suggest that, compared with other functions fulfilled by dresses, a riding dress was not a useful object for middle-class women, as it seems that they were often keen to dispose of their rarely-used and almost new riding dresses. On the other hand, such cases could also imply that women were aware of how popular a riding dress was, and thus that they could exchange or resell their riding dresses at any time, whenever they needed money for something else. They therefore attempted to hide the actual usage the garment had had in order to attract potential buyers, and thus increase the value of their riding dresses.

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Fig. 6-7 The Hunting Dress, *EDM*, 1 December 1869, Issue 60, p. 314, GD:DX1901421840.

Fig. 6-8 The Shooting Dress, *EDM*, 1 November 1875, Issue 187/131, p. 258, GD:DX1902130887.

Fig. 6-9 The Riding Dress, *EDM*, 1 November 1868, Issue 47, p. 256, GD:DX1901421406.

<sup>88</sup> ‘Health and Beauty’, *Punch*, 8 July 1854, Issue 678, GD:DX1901569395.

<sup>89</sup> ‘The Englishwoman’s Exchange’, *EDM*, 1 June 1868, Issue 42, p. 320, GD:DX1901419237; *Ibid.*, 1 July 1868, Issue 43, p. 48, GD:DX1901421302.

In the 1850s, a few periodicals specifically introduced hunting or shooting dresses for women. Women were often advised to wear a riding dress during the hunting season, while the corresponding menswear was more varied and changed according to the type of hunting or shooting, such as otter hunting, duck shooting, grouse shooting or partridge shooting.<sup>90</sup> This might reflect the reality that not many women were involved in blood sports, or that the society of the time did not yet completely approve of hunting or shooting by females. It was not until the 1860s, in any case, that women's magazines started to introduce hunting and shooting dresses. The editor of *EDM*, for example, recommended in 1869 an 'extremely ladylike' hunting dress of green cloth: *cantinière* skirt, knee-length trousers, buff gaiters and thick boots (Figure 6-7); and in 1875 a 'pretty' shooting dress of light cloth, including a tight-fitting jacket bound with velvet, a short skirt, knickerbockers, doeskin gaiters, a felt hat with a plume of cock's feather and a hunting pouch (Figure 6-8).<sup>91</sup> A sweep feather also added femininity. Hunting capes, cloaks or jackets of waterproof material offered further protection from unexpected rain.<sup>92</sup> Compared with riding dresses (Figure 6-9), hunting and shooting dresses (Figures 6-7 & 8) were considered to be masculine in appearance, but women's magazines often used the words 'ladylike' and 'pretty' to emphasise the feminine features of dresses and to soften the masculine style and the 'aggressive' image of females involved in hunting and shooting. It is clear that contemporary periodicals tried to sell and build up an idealised image of the 'ladylike' sportswoman.<sup>93</sup> In time, more functional hunting and shooting dresses with 'more visible' trousers which were not completely hidden by the skirt serve as an indicator of social change in terms of women's rights and lives, as well as a transformation in concepts of femininity: there can be little doubt that 'new women' did not suddenly appear in the late Victorian period.<sup>94</sup> However, it is hard to know whether it was mid-Victorian commentators or women themselves who actually accepted the wearing of such 'visible trouser' styles of

<sup>90</sup> 'Our Small Fashion Plate', *EDM*, 1 September 1866, Issue 21, p. 287, GD:DX1901420126; J. H. Walsh, *Manual of British Rural Sports: Comprising Shooting, Hunting, Cursing, Fishing, Hawking, Racing, Boating, Pedestrianism, and the Various Rural Games and Amusements of Great Britain* (1856), pp. 59-60, 95, 103, 171.

<sup>91</sup> 'The Fashions', *EDM*, 1 December 1869, Issue 60, p. 314, GD:DX1901421840; 'Description of the Fashions and Needlework Engravings', *Ibid.*, 1 December 1875, Issue 187/131, p. 258, GD:DX1902130887.

<sup>92</sup> 'Spinnings in Town', *Ibid.*, 1 October 1867, p. 544, Issue 34, GD:DX1901418992.

<sup>93</sup> On American women hunters in late Victorian sportsmen's magazines, see A. L. Smalley, "'Our Lady Sportsmen': Gender Class, and Conservation in Sport Hunting Magazines, 1873-1920", *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, 4:4(2005), 355-380(pp. 365-371).

<sup>94</sup> In the 1890s, 'new women' wore trousers for cycling. On cycling, see Warner, *When the Girls Game Out to Play*, ch. 6, pp. 104-137; D. Rubinstein, 'Cycling in the 1890s', *Victorian Studies*, 21:1(1977), 47-71; N. Bradfield, 'Cycling in the 1890s', *Costume*, 6(1972), 43-47.

dress, though it is undeniable that they did influence the style of cycling dress worn in the 1890s, and that they later attracted a great deal of criticism.

In short, mid-Victorian social and cultural values did not prevent women from engaging in field sports as long as they maintained an image of submissive femininity and as long as their sportswear emphasised the femininity of their bodies and their beauty and sexuality.

### **Mixed Gender Sporting Dress and Courting**

Sports offered Victorian women not only health and beauty, but also an alternative avenue for interacting with men. This section features archery, croquet and skating, which were the most popular open-air sporting activities for both sexes in the mid-Victorian period, given that such activities did not require too much strength or technique, but did demand considerable skill. This section will also explore how these physical activities related to courting rituals and gender relations in general, and what Victorian women's sportswear reveals about social practices, including suitable arenas for courtship and marriage-making.

Archery was originally associated with a warlike purpose, as bows were regarded as a military weapon, but by the end of the eighteenth century it was considered more as a graceful and elegant art for upper-class men and women to learn.<sup>95</sup> The article 'Health and Grace', published by *EDM* in 1852, recommended that growing girls should do archery, as it strengthened the wrists and induced graceful attitudes.<sup>96</sup> A year later, Dr Caplin declared that for women, archery re-established the 'muscular equilibrium of the arms', and in 1870 the editor of *EDM* noted that the archery ground delighted Englishwomen, and highlighted their modesty.<sup>97</sup> However, a letter from Frances Kemble on 2 July 1875 revealed that:

as for archery being merely a youthful pastime, I think almost all the members of the club are at least middle-aged, and my grave literary friend, James Spedding, who must be near seventy, while I was last at Widmore, was still an ardent toxophilite: and at St. Leonard's the old maiden lady who was the queen of the archery-ground was over sixty, and still 'shot a fine shoot'.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> M. Johnes, 'Archery, Romance and Elite Culture in England and Wales, c. 1780-1840', *History*, 89:294(2004), 193-208.

<sup>96</sup> 'Health and Grace', *EDM*, 1 June 1852, p. 52, GD:DX1901417144.

<sup>97</sup> Dr Caplin's Gymnastic Pilaster, 'Physical Education', *LN*, 12 February 1853, Issue 320, p. 104, GD:DX1900461770; 'Woman: Past, Present, and Future', *Ibid.*, 1 October 1870, Issue 70, p. 219, GD:DX1901422446.

<sup>98</sup> Kemble, *Records*, p. 103, B&I:S4850-D059.

This might be seen to reveal that by 1875 archery had lost much of its popularity among young people, but in fact archery had never gained much traction among the large middle-class population, despite the fact that in 1873 *Cassell's* commented that archery was no longer an expensive activity. The equipment required did include, however, not just bows and arrows, but also a yew bow, bow strings, a belt and punch, a grease box, tassel, bracer, targets and stands.<sup>99</sup>

Unlike archery, croquet required little equipment and was much more accessible for the middle classes. It was not necessary to go to a special croquet ground, and Victorian men and women could play the game in their gardens with homemade materials. The origin of croquet is unclear, though it is believed to have been introduced to England from Ireland in the 1850s. On 10 July 1858, *The Field* (1853-1991) claimed that there was no game which had made such rapid strides in County Meath, Ireland within just a few years as croquet had.<sup>100</sup> In *Routledge's Handbook of Croquet* (1864), a 'well-known author' was enthusiastic about croquet, asserting that 'at no distant day it will become not only the national sport of England, but the pastime of the age'.<sup>101</sup> Not until 1870 did croquet spread to the British colonies, but then it rapidly reached lands such as Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand and South Africa, and became fashionable in America, too.<sup>102</sup> Nevertheless, *The Hampshire Telegraph* of 1864 declared that croquet 'is intended for amusement pure and simple, and not for moral or physical improvement'.<sup>103</sup> This was because of women's fashionable looped-up gowns, under which men could glimpse women's legs. Exposing the legs was considered at the time to be immodest, and so it was essential for women to wear a clean pair of ankle boots. However, it was probably the chance of glimpsing a woman's ankles that was a central factor that attracted men to croquet. By the late 1870s, however, croquet was being replaced by another fashionable sport, tennis.

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<sup>99</sup> *Cassell's*, p. 306.

<sup>100</sup> D. M. C. Prichard, *The History of Croquet* (1981), p. 1; *OED*, <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/44798?rskey=Eg38Ew&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>> [accessed 23 April 2012]

<sup>101</sup> E. Routledge, *Routledge's Handbook of Croquet* (1864), p. 10. A few years later, Edmund Routledge (1843-99) published *The New Handbook of Croquet* (1866), but its contents were almost identical.

<sup>102</sup> *My Canadian Leaves* by France Elizabeth Owen Cole Monck, *A Year's Housekeeping in South Africa* (1879) by Mary Anne Stewart Barker Broome (1831-1911), and *By Land and Ocean, or the Journal of A Young Girl Who Went to South Australia with A Lady Friend, then Alone to Victoria, New Zealand, Sydney, Singapore, China, Japan, and Across the Continent of America Home* (1878) by Fanny Rains (fl. 1875-76) recorded several instances of games of croquet. In 1806, Cape Town in South Africa became a British colony. One of the most popular of novels, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) by Lewis Carroll, also describes Alice Liddell playing croquet with the Red Queen.

<sup>103</sup> 'Croquet', *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle Etc* (1805-unknown), 10 September 1864, Issue 3,388, GD:BB3206074795.

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Fig. 6-10 'Serious Accident during the Frost', *Punch*, 19 January 1861, p. 26, GD:DX1901554303

If croquet was the favourite summer pastime of the time, then skating was the most favoured in winter.<sup>104</sup> Skating was an ancient pastime enjoyed by men, but until the 1860s it had not been recommended for both genders.<sup>105</sup> In the series 'Skating for Ladies', published by *LN* in 1863, Une Giovonotto argued that, like dancing, skating was of great benefit to women, as it developed strength and powers of endurance. There was no danger in skating, although it could be difficult to find a private place to learn the sport.<sup>106</sup> A cartoon 'Serious Accident during the Frost' (Figure 6-10), published by *Punch* in 1861, mocked the 'lovely and accomplished' Emily D- and Harriet V-, who had broken the ice, and had to be 'extricated from their perilous situation'.<sup>107</sup> This image was clearly aimed at dissuading Victorian women from skating, but it ignored the

<sup>104</sup> 'The ladies regret that we're running into winter because there's no more croquet'. 'Happy Thoughts', *Punch*, 12 January 1867, p. 12, GD:DX1901557496. A night skating match in 1857 attracted over 15,000 people to the ice. 'Night Skating-Match', *ILN*, 7 February 1857, p. 116, GD:HN3100045053.

<sup>105</sup> Skating originated in Holland. The other fashionable ice pastime was sliding. On masculinity and skating, see M. L. Adams, 'The Manly History of a "Girls" Sport': Gender, Class and the Development of Nineteenth-century Figure Skating', *The International Journal of History of Sport*, 24:7(2007), 872-893. Skating was very popular among the royal family, including Prince Albert, the Prince of Wales, Princess Beatrice and the Duke of Connaught. Four-wheeled roller-skating, which had recently been introduced, was also fashionable, and could also take place indoors.

<sup>106</sup> Une Giovonotto, 'Skating for Ladies Part I- Why Ladies Ought to Skate, and Why they Do Not', *LN*, 17 January 1863, Issue 838, p. 204, GD:DX1900494441; 'Part II- the Choice of Skates and How to Use them', *Ibid.*, 31 January 1863, Issue 840, p. 245, GD:DX1900494606; 'Part III- Backward and Figure Skating', *Ibid.*, 7 February 1863, Issue 841, p. 252, GD:DX1900494634; 'Part IV- Conclusion A Skating Party; or How we Dressed and What we did One February Day on Coombe Pool', *Ibid.*, 21 February 1863, Issue 843, p. 304, GD:DX1900494856.

<sup>107</sup> *Punch*, 19 January 1861, p. 26, GD:DX1901554303.

fact that this disaster was the result of lack of practice rather than because of skating itself. In *Little Women*, Amy March went skating with her sister Josephine and neighbour Theodore Laurence, and she fell through the ice, not having noticed that the ice was not thick enough in the middle to hold her weight.<sup>108</sup> The novel was proof of the popularity of skating for both sexes at the time, and also provided advice to its readers on how to avoid a skating accident.

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Fig. 6-11 'Archery', *Judy*, 3 July 1867, p. 124, GD:DX1901653998.

Archery, croquet and skating were also regarded as suitable activities for finding a spouse, and provided a socially acceptable venue for flirtation. The cartoon 'Archery', published by *Judy* (Figure 6-11) in 1867, portrayed the gentlemen in the foreground flirting with the female archers, making the point that that women were as good archers of love as Cupid: when they targeted their men, they 'seldom miss their mark'.<sup>109</sup> In 1871, Hippolyte Taine also revealed two letters that showed that women paid a great deal of attention to men's physical appearance at archery meetings: one of them described her husband's person, his figure, the colour of his hair and his complexion, while the other described in detail her feelings from the day when she first met her future husband.<sup>110</sup> In *Daniel Deronda*, George Eliot had the following to say:

<sup>108</sup> Alcott, *Little Women*, Chapter 8, <<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/ALCOTT/ch8.html>>[accessed 19 April 2012]

<sup>109</sup> 'Archery', *Judy*, 3 July 1867, p. 124, GD:DX1901653998.

<sup>110</sup> "M. Taine's 'Notes on England'", *LT*, 1 November 1871, p. 212, GD:DX1902009335.

who can deny that bows and arrows are among the prettiest weapons in the world for feminine forms to play with? They prompt attitudes seen in all marksmanship is freed from associations of bloodshed.<sup>111</sup>

Both men and women, therefore, constructed their masculinity and femininity through participation in sport, and from this perspective sport provides a lens through which we can view how gender relations were being shaped at the time.

Turning our attention to croquet, the gentleman Celeras Solon Smith complained in 1866 to Mr Punch about his matchmaker, Mrs Cuddlewell:

her house is certainly a pleasant one, and you are sure to meet nice people there; but I own, these 'charming girls' have well nigh frightened me away from it. I like croquet well enough, but it becomes a precious bore when one is asked to play it daily for some five hours at a stretch, and with always the same 'charming girl' selected for one's partner.<sup>112</sup>

This reveals that Mrs Cuddlewell used the game of croquet to introduce her girls to Mr Smith, though the reason why he was bored of playing croquet could of course be that those 'charming' girls were not charming enough to attract him to play croquet every day. It is possible that Mr Smith found it too aggressive and aggravating that a woman should indulge in such physical activities, with the implication that such a combative manner might damage the impressions of a potential admirer on the marriage market. On the other hand, a cartoon from *Judy* in 1867, 'The Fox and the Grapes Again' (Figure 6-12), satirised Laura's attempt to use croquet to encourage Captain Dragge into the 'forget-me-not bed', with her friends commenting that her behaviour was 'dreadful'.<sup>113</sup> This probably indicates that, in order to attract Captain Dragge's attention, Laura exposed her ankles immodestly. Before courting, vulgar manners had already damaged Laura's reputation in her community, and the message is clear: women had to behave in accordance with social decorum.

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<sup>111</sup> Eliot, *Deronda*, p. 76.

<sup>112</sup> C. S. Smith, 'A Case of Real Distress', *Punch*, 15 December 1866, p. 239, GD:DX1901573138.

<sup>113</sup> *Judy*, 14 August 1867, p. 207, GD:DX1901654191.



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Fig. 6-12 ‘The Fox and the Grapes again’, *Judy*, 14 August 1867, p. 207, GD:DX1901654191.

Skating was considered a similar activity to dancing, and a skating rink was viewed as an outdoor ballroom. Dancing, which allowed couples to spend time in close proximity, played an important role in courtship, which encouraged young people to devote energy to learning how to skate. An illustration entitled ‘Winter Amusement’, published by *ILN* in 1875, portrayed a crowd of people where both skaters and their audience were enjoying themselves: ‘the couple executing a graceful hand-in-hand dance together may in another moment roll beside each other on the slippery floor of their al fresco ball-room’ (Figure 6-13).<sup>114</sup> In ‘The Skating Rink’, from *Funny Folks* (1875), the gentleman and Mrs Matchmaker both agree that skating is a delightful, graceful activity, and a good way of bringing young people together (Figure 6-14).<sup>115</sup> Both of these cartoons confirm that young people enjoyed the physical contact involved in skating, and suggest another reason why a non-physical contact sport like archery might have lost popularity. In 1868 the editor of *Queen* claimed that Englishwomen skated much more stylishly than Parisians, who appeared to ‘take the rather vigorous

<sup>114</sup> ‘Winter Amusement’, *ILN*, 2 January 1875, Issue 1,847, p. 19, GD:HN3100093994.

<sup>115</sup> ‘The Skating Rink’, *Funny Folks*, 10 July 1875, Issue 31, p. 4, GD:DX1901742546.

exercise more naturally',<sup>116</sup> again demonstrating that for Englishwomen the aim of skating was to show off graceful body movements and thus please potential admirers.

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Fig. 6-13 'Winter Amusement', ILN, 2 January 1875, Issue 1847, p. 19, GD:HN3100093994.

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Fig. 6-14 'The Skating Rink', Funny Folks, 10 July 1875, Issue 31, p. 4, GD:DX1901742546.

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<sup>116</sup> 'Skating and Other Costume at Paris from the *Queen*', *JB*, 11 January 1868, Issue 2,457, p. 29, GD:DX1900547540.

As archery, croquet and skating all provided a social vehicle for middle-class women to find their future husband, their dresses had to show off their femininity. In 1868, John Henry Walsh (1810-88), a sport writer, commented that in most cases female archers wore a green jacket over white, and sometimes over black.<sup>117</sup> In 1873, George Anderson declared that the dress of the archer varied in different clubs, but the 'quieter' one was generally considered the best: a 'very pretty' dress for female archers was a green jacket over a white muslin skirt, with a narrow-brimmed white straw hat with a green and white feather.<sup>118</sup> Such an outfit could be the result of the traditional British custom that the uniform of archery clubs had to be based on the colour green, and Anne Buck pointed out that from 1787 members at meetings of the Royal British Bowmen had to appear 'in green and buff uniform under penalty of one guinea'.<sup>119</sup> In *Daniel Deronda*, too, Gwendolen wore a white cashmere dress at an archery meeting, and her hat was decorated with a pale green feather.<sup>120</sup> The novel goes on:

it was the fashion to dance in the archery dress, throwing off the jacket; and the simplicity of her [Gwendolen] white cashmere with its border of pale green set off her form to utmost. I [Mrs Davilow] think line of gold round her neck, and the gold star on her breast, were only ornaments. Her smooth soft hair pile up into a grand crown made of a clear line above her brow. Sir Joshua would have been glad to take her portrait.<sup>121</sup>

Gwendolen was aware that too much decoration on her dress would not allow her to move freely and perform well at archery, but equally at an archery party her femininity and beauty had to be enhanced through simple dress and accessories such as a gold necklace and star brooch. It was indeed this look that encouraged Sir Joshua to paint her.

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<sup>117</sup> Walsh, *Sports*, p. 588.

<sup>118</sup> G. Anderson, *The Art of Skating; Containing Many Figures Never Previously Described* (1873), pp. 59 & 60-61.

<sup>119</sup> A. Buck, 'Dress for Archery, 1790-1825', in M. Flury-Lemberg and K. Stolleis (eds.), *Documenta Textilia: Festschrift für Sigrid Müller-Christensen* (München, 1981), pp. 393-404 (p. 396). The hero of English medieval folklore Robin Hood is depicted wearing green, which was a kind of camouflage in the forest, as brightly-coloured clothes might scare away prey.

<sup>120</sup> Eliot, *Deronda*, p. 71.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

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Fig. 6-15 *The Fair Toxophilites: English Archers, Nineteenth Century* (1872), William Powell Frith, RAMM:17114.

However, Victorians did not have to wear green at archery meetings. In *The Fair Toxophilites: English Archers, Nineteenth Century* (1872) (Figure 6-15), the English painter William Powell Frith (1819-1909) portrayed his three daughters Alice, Fanny and Louisa (left to right) wearing lavender, beige and maroon, and white, with elegant simplicity. From a twenty-first century viewpoint, Victorian women's sportswear would undoubtedly be considered constructed and picturesque but impractical, but according to Victorian dress etiquette, a respectable woman's clothes had to be suited to each occasion which she attended: her picturesque 'sportswear' should certainly not prevent her from doing 'moderate' exercise. In 1869, the *Manchester Times* claimed that 'French women generally consent to copy the out-of-door dress of English women', showing that Englishwomen knew how to dress practically and stylishly outdoors, particularly in mixed-gender activities.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> 'The Ladies' Column', *Manchester Times*, 14 August 1869, GD:Y3206426980.

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Fig. 6-16 The Croquet Dress, *WF*, 1 August 1866, Issue 512, GD:DX1902137818.

Fig. 6-17 The Garibaldi Jacket and Croquet Skirt, MCG:1947.3916 & 1947.505.

The style of croquet dress was similar to that of archery dress, but the colours were brighter. In 1866, *WF* advised ‘skirts of striped cashmere or flannel, looped up at up at intervals by pointed tabs of red flannel, edged with narrow black velvet, and having in the centre of each tab, a black tassel, fastened by a gold ornament’. A white muslin chemisette was worn under a short scarlet cashmere jacket fastened by gilt buttons (Figure 6-16).<sup>123</sup> Rather than impractical long coats, a short jacket was particularly fashionable in the late afternoon or on a windy day, to avoid the danger of catching a cold. MCG shows a similar collection (Figure 6-17): the skirt, from about 1870, is made of a mixture of white twilled wool and cotton, woven with narrow vertical black stripes, and the hem is edged with scarlet cashmere with applied bands of diamond and tab motifs in black velvet edged with red, white and yellow braid. The waistband is made of black velvet, trimmed with red braid.<sup>124</sup> However, in 1871 the *Sporting Gazette* claimed that:

although various costumes more or less becoming and fanciful are in vogue with the votaries of croquet, there has not as yet been any uniform dress as peculiarly appropriate for the croquet lawn as there is for the hunting field.<sup>125</sup>

<sup>123</sup> ‘Description of the Plates of Costumes’, *WF*, 1 August 1866, Issue 512, GD:DX1902137818. In 1861, *The Leeds Mercury* (1807-1900) declared that the purely ‘Britannic’ inventions were the riding hat, the red petticoat, the looped-up gown and the double-laced Balmoral boot, and that now Paris had copied London, not vice versa. ‘The Dress of English and French Women’. *The Leeds Mercury*, 4 November 1861, Issue 7,351, GD:BB3201587415.

<sup>124</sup> Red boots were *de rigueur* for croquet at Eglinton Castle in Scotland. Prichard, *Croquet*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>125</sup> ‘Croquet Costume’, *Sporting Gazette*, 22 April 1871, Issue 467, p. 276, GD:DX1900421904.

This reflects the fact that even in the 1870s women were still struggling to find a suitable garment for croquet: the dress required for hunting was well established, compared to ‘fanciful’ croquet dress. Furthermore, in *The History of Croquet*, D. M. C. Prichard points out that ‘croquet was an opportunity for a titillating display of feminine fashion’, indicating that women’s croquet clothes were designed to arouse men.<sup>126</sup> An 1875 diary entry by Francis Kilvert is revealing:

at 4 o’clock Miss Meredith Brown and her beautiful sister Etty came over to tea with us and a game of croquet. Etty ... was dressed in light grey with a close fitting crimson body which set off her exquisite figure.... But the greatest triumph was her hat, broad and picturesque, carelessly turned with flowers and set jauntily on one side of her pretty dark head, which round her shapely slender throat, she wore a rich gold chain necklace with broad gold links.<sup>127</sup>

This confirms that Etty was quite aware of the effect that she could have on the croquet ground, and so she dressed elaborately to create a flattering effect or for courting. Her ‘picturesque’ display did not fail to attract Kilvert’s attention.

As croquet was a fashionable social activity among mid-Victorians, many general newspapers and periodicals provided information on the rules and etiquette of the game, and also updates on the latest croquet dress. Nevertheless, the popular French fashion-based magazine *LF* never recommended croquet dresses to their readers during this period. In 1867, *WF* introduced a new fashionable dress from Paris, but it was called a ‘sea-side’ or ‘croquet costume’,<sup>128</sup> which seems to suggest that in France croquet was not so fashionable as in England, and that the French fashion industry did not particularly require a croquet dress. For this reason, croquet dress was not created by Parisian fashion houses, but was rather based on the life experiences of Englishwomen.

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<sup>126</sup> Prichard, *Croquet*, p. 12.

<sup>127</sup> Cited in Cunningham, *Sports*, pp. 65-66.

<sup>128</sup> ‘Description of the Plates of Costumes’, *WF*, 1 August 1867, Issue 524, GD:DX1902137999.

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Fig. 6-18 'Croquet in America', *Punch*, 6 August 1864, p. 54, GD:DX1901579090.

Furthermore, English croquet dress seems to have been different from the clothes worn in America or Australia. In the satirical illustration 'Croquet in America', published by *Punch* in 1864 (Figure 6-18), an American essayist mocked the fact that Americans did not know how to play the foreign game of croquet:

not on the effete and shaven lawn, but on the boundless prairie; not with the pusillanimous hammer, but with the massive war-club, with which we smite the bounding ninety-six pound cannon ball, through a series of triumphal arches, until we sink it right into the bosom of sun-down.<sup>129</sup>

They seemed to confuse croquet with cricket, and female players dressed in bloomers. Though this cartoon might not truly represent the way Americans played croquet, it was only introduced to America during the Civil War (1861-65), and so it is likely that not all Americans understood how to play croquet.<sup>130</sup> In 1865, *The Australian Journal* also announced that:

the 'lawn dress' is the name of the ladies' new costume for the croquet ground (says *The Court Journal*). It is similar to the Bloomer costume, and is considered very appropriate when playing the game.<sup>131</sup>

<sup>129</sup> *Punch*, 6 August 1864, p. 54, GD:DX1901579090.

<sup>130</sup> J. Sterngass, 'Cheating, Gender Roles, and the Nineteenth-Century Croquet Craze', *Journal of Sport History*, 25:3(1998), 398-418(p. 399).

<sup>131</sup> 'Miscellaneous', *The Australian Journal*, 9 September 1865, Issue 2, p. 31, GD:CC1904098808.



The Bloomer dress was much more convenient for women to play croquet, but in England, the wearing of trousers was thought to destroy women's femininity, and sporting clothes had to be ladylike because croquet was more of a sociable than a competitive activity.<sup>132</sup> Americans, for their part, later learnt how to dress for croquet from their English sisters. In the painting *Croquet Scene* (1866) (Figure 6-19), the American artist Winslow Homer (1836-1910) portrays three women dressed in bright, elegant looped gowns, genteelly playing croquet with a gentleman.<sup>133</sup>

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Fig. 6-19 *Croquet Scene* (1866), Winslow Homer, The Art Institute of Chicago:1942.35.

As skating was a wintertime mixed-gender outdoor activity, outfits not only had to be warm enough to protect the skater from illness, but they also had to enhance a woman's feminine charms. A high, half-fitting bodice, accompanied by a walking-length double skirt, a hat with an ostrich feather, gloves and boots, were often trimmed with either fur, such as sable, grebe, miniver, sealskin or chinchilla, or velours or velvet (Figure 6-20).<sup>134</sup> Fashionable materials for skating dresses included cloth,

<sup>132</sup> Edmund Routledge declared that by playing croquet, 'we trust that they will be received in a gentle spirit'. Routledge, *Croquet*, p. 48. Arthur Lillie (b. 1831) claimed that garden-party croquet was an amusement rather than a competition. A. Lillie, *The Book of Croquet: Its Tactics, Laws, & Mode of Play* (1872), p. 17. Adburgham pointed out that the Australian and New Zealand women's croquet teams always wore white, while the English women wore what they pleased rather than a specific uniform. A. Adburgham, *View of Fashion* (1966), p. 43.

<sup>133</sup> Other Homer's croquet paintings include *Croquet Player* (1865), *A Game of Croquet* (1866) and *The Croquet Match* (1867).

<sup>134</sup> 'The Fashions', *EDM*, 1 January 1868, Issue 37, p. 32, GD:DX1901419081; 'Skating Costume from the Queen', *Ibid.*, 1 February 1869, Issue 50, p. 88, GD:DX1901421524; 'Description of the Fashions and Needlework Engravings', *Ibid.*, 1 January 1870, Issue 61, p. 50, GD:DX1901422189; 'Skating Costumes from the Queen', *JB*, 24 December 1870, Issue 2,641, p. 88, GD:DX1900555177.

cheviot tweed and foulard.<sup>135</sup> Skaters could also wear a scarf, sacque, mantle or paletot, and the collection held at MCG, for example, includes a pale blue satin quilted well-fitted waistcoat trimmed with white swan down (Figure 6-21). The editor of *EDM* warned the magazine's readers that it was only suitable to have a considerable amount of *fourrure* in a skating dress, as it was too heavy for a walking dress, except in a very cold winter.<sup>136</sup> This indicates that a respectable woman paid attention to the suitability of clothes for each occasion. Weatherproof boots, too, were an important accessory for skating, with *Cassell's* arguing that winter walking boots had to be 'solid' and 'weather resisting': an extra pair of clumped soles also offered good protection for women walking in winter.<sup>137</sup> For skating, iron and strips had to be tied firmly to the boots,<sup>138</sup> as if the strips became loose, they often threw the wearer.



Fig. 6-20 The Skating Dresses, *Queen*, January 1873, CM.

Fig. 6-21 The Blue Skating Waistcoat (1875-85), MCG:1957.432.

As regards other accessories, during archery and croquet gloves were worn to protect the hands and fingers from abrasions, but for skating gloves or muffs were used to warm the hands. A hat or bonnet was an imperative for outdoor life, and it was worn tilted over a woman's brow to shade her eyes. In 1867, *JB* issued the following warning to its readers:

<sup>135</sup> 'Patterns for Needlework', *EDM*, 1 February 1875, Issue 178/122, p. 81, GD:DX1902130364.

<sup>136</sup> 'The January Fashions', *Ibid.*, 1 January 1873, Issue 97, p. 24, GD:DX1901420823; 'The February Fashions', *Ibid.*, 1 February 1874, Issue 110, p. 80, GD:DX1901421172.

<sup>137</sup> *Cassell's*, p. 354.

<sup>138</sup> G. D. B., 'Skating No. II', *LN*, 10 January 1863, Issue 837, p. 185, GD:DX1900494357.

let our young girls play croquet with clean, unpainted, and unveiled faces, till their cheeks,[...], become like a peach, [...] and let our English matrons take their lot of slow fading without attempt to rebel against the universal decree that ‘after ripeness cometh decline’.<sup>139</sup>

A Victorian woman of taste had to avoid wearing make-up for sport, because one of the fundamental purposes of taking part in sport was to present a ‘natural’ and healthy appearance, and make-up was of course considered improper in the mid-Victorian period.<sup>140</sup> In brief, archery, croquet and skating constituted a way for middle-class women to find a husband, and so they had to dress and behave properly to show their sociability, gentility and feminine charms.

### Conclusion

Mid-Victorian periodicals and novels reveal a major growth in women’s participation in ‘moderate’ sports, and cartoons also offer a strong narrative that respectable women should provide gentle and cooperative company for their men, rather than be competitive athletes. Close analysis of these textual and visual sources suggests that any aggressive concept of femininity which implied a threat to the predominant gender ideology had to be avoided. However, mid-Victorian femininity did not simply present the ‘delicate’ and ‘fragile’ image embodied by the ‘Angel in the House’, but also expressed a new type of femininity, with an angel-like healthy body which allowed women to fulfil the role of female fertility, to support their family, and to help others. Furthermore, this healthy body, with an accompanying ‘naked’ face, in some way confirmed the concepts of dress reform and the emergence of Aesthetic Dress, both of which stressed health and natural beauty above all else.

Victorian women’s sportswear played an essential role in not only shaping gender identity and modesty, but also in reflecting changes in women’s lives. Female bathers had to cover almost all of their body, while men could sometimes go naked. By the 1860s, though, female bathing dress had changed from a loose gown to a more practical two-piece dress, reflecting women’s shift from inactive bathing to active swimming. Women started to freely wear trousers in women-only water activities, though for riding, hunting and shooting, which took place in male company, they had to hide their trousers under their skirts to maintain their gender identity and modesty, because trousers were an important signifier for the construction and expression of

<sup>139</sup> ‘The Dress of Ladies’, *JB*, 3 August 1867, Issue 2,434, p. 544, GD:DX1900546180.

<sup>140</sup> On Victorian make-up, see Chapter 3, p.142.

gender in the Victorian social and cultural context. By the late 1860s, however, hunting and shooting dresses, worn with incompletely-covered trousers, had been introduced, and were regarded as 'ladylike' and 'pretty' by contemporary women's magazines. This shows that more women took part in blood sports and that there was a demand for more functional clothing, that the public was broadly in favour of women's participation in field sports, and that the media used 'feminine' words to soften the masculine image of blood sports, with a view to encouraging female readers to purchase, and persuade the male audience to accept, this new style of clothes.

Archery, croquet and skating, on the other hand, were regarded primarily as a social occasion, an opportunity for flirtation and for selecting a spouse. The main priority for the clothes required in such arenas was therefore to enhance the beauty and femininity of the wearer, which could explain why the style of dress resembled that of ordinary dress. It is unfair, though, to judge the lack of mobility from a twenty-first century perspective, because Victorian sportswear had to balance gender identity, modesty and mobility, particularly when playing sports in a mixed-gender sphere. Compared with ordinary dress, archery, croquet and skating clothes were less decorated and were adapted to allow more space for the arms and body to move 'freely': the skirt was shorter, the clothes were made of practical materials, the crinoline was smaller, and the corset was less tight. Last but not least, it should be noted that croquet was intrinsically English in character, and that other nations were ridiculed for not dressing appropriately, thus revealing their lack of understanding of the game. In this sense, croquet dress represented the quintessential Englishness of English dress in the mid-Victorian period.

Sportswear is one of the most useful vehicles through which to explore issues of gender and tension between tradition and modernity in mid-Victorian England.

## Conclusion

This thesis is a valuable new study of clothes culture among middle-class women in mid-Victorian England (c. 1851-75). It centres on how clothes and clothes practices reflected and constructed middle-class women's gender and identity; how clothes fashioned and reinforced their femininity and gender relations; and what clothes revealed about the experiences which they lived. It extends the interdisciplinary methods of material culture and dress history to bring together a new range of previously unstudied sources for the first time, and considers the implications of these for how we understand the meaning of middle-class women's clothes. The following conclusion reflects on the value of the different sources that are employed in the thesis and the nuanced picture of the role of dress in creating femininity that emerges from the study of these materials together.

While earlier studies of Victorian dress focused on aristocratic fashion and on chronological and stylistic analysis,<sup>1</sup> recent, more subtle dress studies have concentrated on the clothing of the middle-class men, the working classes and the poor.<sup>2</sup> Social and gender historians of the nineteenth century, on the other hand, have undertaken in-depth analysis of the gender, economics and lives of the middle classes through the use of archival documents, but have neglected surviving dresses. Although many historians, such as Vickery, Morgan, and Gordon and Nair, have challenged the theory of separate spheres as outlined in *Family Fortunes* by Davidoff and Hall, namely that middle-class women were confined within the private sphere and were relatively powerless, few have thrown much light on middle-class women's relationship with clothes, which were essential objects in their daily lives.<sup>3</sup> This thesis therefore studies clothes practices by mid-Victorian middle-class women to reveal their gender, class and identity, and to enhance our view of dress history, material culture studies as well as gender and social history.

The thesis has drawn on a broad range of primary sources, given that each individual source has its own limitations. It begins with a chapter analysing prescriptive literature in order to understand the values and attitudes of the mid-Victorians to their dress. On a basis of a survey of advice manuals and instructions offered in magazines,

<sup>1</sup> On earlier studies of Victorian dress, see Cunnington, *English Women's Clothing*; idem, *Handbook of English Costume*; Buck, *Victorian Costume*.

<sup>2</sup> On the clothing of the middle-class men, see Breward, *Hidden Consumer*; Shannon, *Cut of his Coat*; Ugolini, *Menswear*. On the dress of the working class and the poor, see Richmond, *Clothing the Poor*; Worth, 'Rural Working-Class Dress'.

<sup>3</sup> Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*; Vickery, 'Golden Age'; Gordon and Nair, *Public Lives*; Morgan, *Women's Place*.

this chapter argues that Christianity and etiquette remained paramount, so the dress of respectable middle-class women was used to confirm their primary moral values, and to create identity according to gender, age, and marital and social status. Corsets, for example, were considered to be a signifier of female moral restraint and a means of ensuring a good figure for leisured women. For this reason, working-class women, too, might wear a corset for their 'Sunday best' dress.<sup>4</sup> Trousers, on the other hand, were regarded as a signifier of male gender, and so middle-class women who wore the masculine Bloomer dress (Figure 1-2) in mixed-gender spaces were widely criticised. These show how important clothing could be to Victorian gender relationships.

Moral display and dress etiquette, however, were not necessarily a symbol of repression. Middle-class women could be empowered through appropriate clothes and practices. A demi-corseted morning dress, for instance, allowed a woman to perform her domestic work well, which empowered her to be a good wife or a responsible housekeeper. When a wife performed her role in the family, she conformed to the mid-Victorian gender hierarchy, but this could also be a means of gaining the love and respect of her husband and family. At an evening party, wearing a simple dress with a proper size of corset and crinoline neither weakened an unmarried woman's health nor hampered her own and others' movement, as Roberts has argued.<sup>5</sup> But it could enrich her morality, femininity and elegance, which in turn helped her to attract a potential suitor and achieve a suitable marriage. This, at least, was the idealised image of the well-dressed middle-class woman created by prescriptive literature. The following chapters examine this against other written and visual sources as well as material objects.

The second and third chapters combine periodicals, letters, diaries, fashion plates, cartoons, surviving dresses and historical photographs to explore how middle-class women applied the fashions shown in magazines to their actual dresses and how they negotiated morality and etiquette to express their self-identity. Surviving dresses not only reveal much about the material of the dress, and details of sewing techniques and alterations, but they also provide hints as to the figure and taste of the wearer, which could rarely be learned from conventional historical sources such as prescriptive literature, periodicals and advertisements. Historical photographs, too, offer clear images of how clothing looked in use and in what combinations it was worn, and a more nuanced view of how clothes were worn by different age groups of sitters. Further,

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<sup>4</sup> On the poor's corsetry, see Richmond, *Clothing the Poor*, pp. 127-129.

<sup>5</sup> Roberts, 'Exquisite Slave', p. 557.

only by treating photography as ‘material culture’ and understanding the processes that produced these photographs can we successfully interpret the meaning of the dress that appears in photographs. These chapters relocate these material objects in their social contexts and bridge the gap between studies of social and gender history and dress in museums and pictorial representation.

Surviving dresses and dresses shown in historical photographs indicate that middle-class women played an active role in fashion, dressing both fashionably and modestly. With the development of synthetic dyes, the bright colours of surviving women’s dresses (Figures 2-27 ~ 2-35) contributed to a sense of modernity and can be seen as a sign of women’s engagement with new material forms in the mid-Victorian era. However, with a limited clothing budget, middle-class women seemed to prefer multi-function dresses, and durable colours and styles (Figures 2-13 ~ 2-15), often ordering a dress that could be adapted to serve as both a day and an evening dress (Figures 2-21 & 2-22). Surviving colourful wedding dresses, made up in the style of a day dress, are a good example of how practical and careful middle-class women used their clothing budget. These findings correspond with statements in mid-Victorian prescriptive literature and women’s magazines that simplicity and elegance were seen as English national values, and the top priority for English middle-class women when dressing up: the dress of a self-respecting and respectable Englishwoman had therefore to be morally superior.

Compared with surviving dresses, historical photographs offer a wide range of images of Victorian dresses, given that delicate ornamentation could have worn out, been removed or disappeared over the years. Only one surviving dress from RH is decorated with two rosettes, for example, whereas several photographed dresses were decorated with rosettes (Figure 3-46).<sup>6</sup> Most sitters in photographs have worn their own dresses to project their identity instead of studio dresses, and sitters from different areas often dressed in a similar way, making it difficult to judge whether provincial sitters were less fashionable than urban ones. This could be due to the wide distribution of women’s magazines, though it is also possible that in order to ensure a clear image, women sitters followed photographers’ dress suggestions, with the result that their clothes often resembled one another. The only exception to this phenomenon in the case studies was the images from studios in Belfast (Figure 3-48), which seem to be more concerned with presenting a sense of cleanliness and neatness than with fashion, and

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<sup>6</sup> RH:116-1934-1.



this might suggest a difference between England and Northern Ireland though these sitters were the possibly of a lower social status. More work, though, is needed to determine the state of fashion in different geographical areas, and likewise, owing to the lack of surviving evidence of the historical sources used in my thesis, it has proved to be difficult to analyse differences between middle-class groups, such as Anglicans, Evangelicals and radicals. Further research is therefore required to build up a regionally and occupationally varied picture of middle-class women's clothing.

As has been shown, depictions of dress in different media were used to express different and distinct images of the femininity of middle-class women. Prescriptive literature suggested that the ideal image was the middle-class women as the 'Angel in the House' who concentrated on decorating her home and taking care of her family, while fashion plates depicted young white women enjoying leisure activities, which represented female sociability rather than domesticity (Figures 2-4 ~ 2-10). Given the strong association that both historians and contemporaries have made between women and domesticity, this is a significant find. Cartoons, on the other hand, offered a narrative of how disreputable women wore exaggerated fashions or aggressively engaged in physical activities (Figures 1-3, 1-4, 1-7, 6-6, & 6-18). In studio photographs, most women were shown holding a book, perhaps as a demonstration of their education (Figure 3-15). This too seems significant, as an image of cultured leisure. Young sitters often presented an image of feminine shyness and delicacy, and dressed simply but fashionably (Figure 3-21), while middle-aged ones often looked directly at the camera and dressed in a more luxurious style (Figures 3-37 ~ 3-39), reflecting their increased confidence. Older sitters tended to wear obsolete styles of dress (Figures 3-40 & 3-41), which could be associated with a lack of fashion awareness, financial difficulties or widowhood, and most wore a cap to present an image of a respectable elderly woman (Figure 3-23). My study of the appearance of middle-aged women in mid-Victorian photographs shows a surprising level of confidence and apparent enjoyment in these women, which is in stark contrast to the earlier assumption that the clothes of middle-aged women were dull and dowdy. This shows that with the passage of time, the status of women changed, and their power increased. Compared with young unmarried women, elderly spinsters or widows, a wife had more money and freedom to make her personal decisions.

The aim of Chapters Four and Five shifts to investigate the symbolic meanings of clothing production and consumption of middle-class women. Letters and diaries help us to understand personal reactions to clothes practices. The letter of Mrs Jane

Carlyle shows that she disliked sewing, but she used her superfluous scarf to make her a house jacket for reasons of economy,<sup>7</sup> whereas a letter written by Octavia Hill, expressed feelings of guilt that she could not do any sewing even when she was sick.<sup>8</sup> Sewing was not only a self-improving activity used to construct middle-class women's moral and domestic values, but also an enjoyable one which helped women to maintain and enhance their outward appearance. 'Blanche', for example, wrote to the editor of *EDM* that her two daughters wanted pretty patterns for a young lady's dress, collars and chemisettes, showing that these girls used their skills to make them look pretty, and that sewing made the closeness of the mother-daughter bond.<sup>9</sup> In addition, sewing was a real means of cementing social networks, and enabling those who practised it to build up their self-esteem as women. Alice Mary Moore Wade disliked needlework, but she felt much happier and did it beautifully when she realised that needlework helped the poor.<sup>10</sup> The clothes practices of middle-class women were as much a source of material pleasure as a symbol of female submissiveness.

The fourth chapter also explores the relationship between the sewing machine and mid-Victorian middle-class women and men, which historians have not analysed yet. Sewing machine advertising established a diverse range of images and statements to attract different categories of middle-class women. For traditional women, such as clergyman's daughters, the sewing machine was associated with thrift (Figure 4-7). For others, sewing machines could offer not only a fashionable dress and a highly comfortable life but also authority. The Whight & Mann sewing machine, for instance, was once advertised as a lady's 'good servant', which relieved its owner of hard work (Figure 4-10). Cartoons also suggest that for some middle-class men, the sewing machine brought with it the anxiety that once a woman was using a machine for sewing, she would have time to educate herself, and that without hand-sewing a woman would lose her gender identity and morality. Other depictions in adverts offer a different image though: buying a sewing machine for their wives symbolised their status as a breadwinner and a caring husband, as well as serving as an appreciation of their wives' domesticity. If a sewing machine signified gender anxiety and pleasure, a sewing box was an instructional marker of passing womanhood down from a dutiful mother to a good daughter, and also a symbol of transformation from girlhood to womanhood, from depending on the support of others to taking care of them. These address that sewing

<sup>7</sup> Froude (ed.), *Carlyle*, Vol. 2, B&I:S4445-D070, see Chapter 4, p. 171.

<sup>8</sup> Hill, *Life*, B&I:S7466-D101, see Chapter 4, p. 198.

<sup>9</sup> 'The Englishwoman's Conversazione', GD:DX1901420836, see Chapter 4, p. 201.

<sup>10</sup> 'Front Matter', in Moore (ed.), B&I:S5198-D001, see Chapter 4, p. 205.

objects constructed the relationship between wife and husband as well as between mother and daughter.

Chapter Five focuses on records of purchase and ownership, including inventories, account books, clothing bills and the notebooks of a tailor and a dressmaker. The study of inventories provides unique insight into social conformity as well as the individual preferences of middle-class women. No nineteenth-century dress historians have studied inventories, as it has long been assumed that few probate inventories were made in nineteenth-century England. In the 26 clothing inventories studied here, most women owned chemises, which covered the intimate parts of their bodies and prolonged the life of their outer garments, thus suggesting both their moral character as women and their standards of economy. Chemises also added to the comfort of the wearer, which conformed to contemporary standards of etiquette, and allowed women to change daily and maintain their cleanliness, given that Victorians generally washed their washable dresses once a week. Shawls, caps and bonnets, which were considered as essential accessories for women going out according to prescriptive literature, are also often recorded in the inventories. However, few inventories list pairs of drawers, and this could perhaps be because the inventory was regarded as a form of social display, and as such they might refrain from recording the intimate items of the deceased, thus maintaining standards of morality and gender identity for women. No inventories in this research include a 'corset' or crinoline.<sup>11</sup> Although the chapter is based on 26 inventories, it cannot in any way claim to be comprehensive or representative. Nevertheless, the absence of drawers and crinolines is a highly suggestive negative finding-raising the possibility that new innovations were for less normative than fashion illustrations might lead us to expect.

Account books and dress bills as well as the notebooks of a tailor and a dressmaker show some of the purchasing decisions made by women. The varied dresses of middle-aged wife Mrs Mary Baker expressed sociability and she is the only individual in my research who purchased corsets, suggesting her fashionableness.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, black, white and grey dresses purchased by Mrs Marianne Grove Price signified her old age and widowed status.<sup>13</sup> In mid-Victorian England, a widow had to wear mourning dress to mourn her dead husband for at least two years. The account book of Mrs Mary Ann Spring is a demonstration of Victorian domesticity: she often

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<sup>11</sup> On 'stays', see Chapter 5, pp. 223-224.

<sup>12</sup> GA:D3549/25/2/3, see Chapter 5, pp. 214-215.

<sup>13</sup> GA:D3398/1/3/7, see Chapter 5, p. 213.

bought fabrics rather than clothes, which might suggest that she herself actually followed the suggestions of advice books regarding doing sewing and trimming at home.<sup>14</sup> To keep up a decent appearance, a respectable middle-class woman had to know how to sew, and being a prudent and economical wife also gave her authority in household management. In the tailor's and dressmaker's notebooks, customers struggled to maintain the condition and thus extend the lifetime of their possessions, requesting alterations or repairs to the items to suit changes in their figure and age.<sup>15</sup> They also reveal that customers rarely requested chemises, shirts or items for children, confirming that most middle-class women were able to sew simple clothes for their families, in accordance with their roles of domestic duty and motherly or wifely love, as well as to save the family budget.

Dress and accessories, moreover, played a key role in middle-class women's lived experiences and social practices. Gloves, which were considered as an important constructor of female modesty, gentility and respectability, are rarely recorded in inventories and historical photographs, suggesting that not many middle-class women wore gloves, and this might be why the need for gloves was emphasised in prescriptive literature. If mid-Victorian middle-class women themselves regarded gloves as a fashionable accessory to display their whiteness and leisured lifestyle as in Beaujot's argument, they should have been extensively represented in photographs, a popular communication tool of the time.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, evening dresses are largely absent from the object-based studies (Figures 2-17 ~ 2-20), as well as from the tailor's and dressmaker's notebooks, inventories and historical photographs, implying that for a middle-class woman this type of dress might not have been as important as others, very probably because they might not have had many opportunities to attend a ball or party. The letter of George Eliot also reveals that she had no ball dress, and preferred not to attend Bessie Rayner Parkes Belloc's party to prevent her taste and personality from being judged.<sup>17</sup> The preference for day dresses shows us that for the mid-Victorian middle-class women, ballrooms were not the only place to socialise or to meet their potential husbands. These choices are indicative of the importance of dressing for the more ordinary daytime sociability of the Victorian middle-classes, such as 'At Homes', tea parties and local visits.

<sup>14</sup> GA:D1858/A4, see Chapter 5, pp. 215-216.

<sup>15</sup> GA:D6193/2/1; SHC:1261/5, see Chapter 5, pp. 216-219.

<sup>16</sup> Beaujot, *Victorian Fashion Accessories*, esp. ch.1, pp. 31-62.

<sup>17</sup> Haight (ed.), *Eliot, Vol. 6*, B&I:S7133-D161, see Chapter 1, pp. 70-71.

The thesis concludes with a chapter about sportswear, which is an invaluable source for studying the roles of middle-class women and gender relations. Undertaking moderate exercise was of great benefit for middle-class women, as it developed a healthy body, which was believed to be linked to female fertility. Overdoing exercise, though, was also seen to destroy feminine beauty, leading to the loss of a delicate complexion. By the 1860s, women's magazines had begun to offer their readers sportswear, such as the 'bathing costume', 'shooting dress' and 'skating costume', suggesting that mid-Victorian women took part in more activities and sports than the early Victorians did, and that dress and Victorian gender values accommodated a wider range of behaviours and identities than previously thought. In the 1860s, middle-class women were allowed to wear trousers for bathing or swimming in women-only areas (Figures 6-1 & 6-2). However, when taking part in field sports, a respectable woman had to negotiate her mobility with modesty. With this in mind, therefore, she wore invisible trousers hidden under a long skirt, to maintain her femininity and to be gentle and cooperative company for her menfolk. Any aggressive concept of femininity, implying a threat to the predominant gender ideology, had to be avoided. In archery, croquet and skating, for example, which were regarded primarily as an opportunity for flirtation and for selecting a spouse, the object of sportswear for women was to enhance their beauty and femininity (Figures 6-15, 6-16 ~ 6-17, 6-20 & 6-21). Although freedom in dress for nineteenth-century women is usually associated with rational dress and cycling dress in the later period, my study suggests that mid-Victorian women could be empowered through sport and dress as well.

Furthermore, what is significant in this chapter is the debate on the Englishness of English dress. Though France proved to be the major source of fashion information for mid-Victorian women, sportswear was viewed as representative of the English dress and national life. Compared with French, American and Australian women, Englishwomen often tended to dress for outdoor activities. Their simple and sober riding and travelling dress was praised by the French critic Hippolyte Taine, and later adopted by French women.<sup>18</sup> Playing croquet, too, did not only develop in mid-Victorian England in geographical terms, but the game itself and the social event that it represented was emblematic of the genteel behaviour of the English middle classes. Croquet dress (Figures 6-16 & 6-17) could, in fact, be regarded as the most English of all English dress in the mid-Victorian period.

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<sup>18</sup> Taine, *Notes*, p. 56; 'The Ladies' Column', GD:Y3206426980, see Chapter 6, pp. 254, 265.

This thesis has provided a valuable and much-needed contribution to the dress history and material culture of middle-class women in mid-Victorian England. By combining written, visual and physical evidence, it brings us a broader historical understanding of how clothes played an important part in constructing middle-class women's respectability and femininity, and maintaining their authority through their lived experiences. Overall the thesis reveals the complexity and nuances involved in the representation and practice of mid-Victorian femininities. While the view of the Victorian middle-class woman as a domestic 'Angel' has been challenged by many historians, this thesis affirms the significance of dress in creating gendered standards of morality and etiquette that women were supposed to live up to. Yet there was more than one kind of femininity depicted in representations of dress. Moreover, when we come to dress as a lived practice, we see the ways in which individual women used dress for their own ends. Finally, dress represents both the freedoms and restrictions that mid-Victorian middle-class women were confronted with in their everyday lives.

Appendix 1: Details of 26 Women's Clothing Inventories, between 1850 and 1875

Surname	Wigan	Wilkinson	Cockle	Flaxell	Gardiner	Parry	Barrett	Dunsdon	Fouls	Stephens	Harley	Davis	Short	Owen	Limerick	Green	Groat	Goulston	Edwards	Bradly	Arnold	Rosier	Lake	Scott	Sims	Meadows	Total
Born-Died	d 1850	d 1850	1831-51	1784-1852	d 1852	d 1853	1767-1852	1785-1854	1804-52	d 1855	1792-1857	d 1858	1792-1858	d 1858	1779-1860	1778-1857	d 1863	d 1862	1766-1863	d 1864	d 1864	d 1869	d 1869	d 1874	1842-73	1821-75	
Age	N/A	N/A	20	68	N/A	N/A	85	69	48	N/A	65	N/A	66	n/a	81	79	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	31	54	
Place	Kent	Middlesex	Durham	Stafford	Middlesex	Hereford	Middlesex	Wills	Middlesex	Kent	Warrington	N/A	Surrey	Middlesex	Middlesex	Essex	Surrey	Surrey	Middlesex	Surrey	Surrey	Kent	Middlesex	Surrey	Middlesex		
Marital status	Spinster	Widow	Spinster	Widow	Spinster	Spinster	Spinster	Widow	Widow	Widow	Widow	N/A	Widow	Widow	Widow	Widow	Spinster	Widow	Widow	Spinster	Widow	Spinster	Spinster	Spinster	Spinster		
Valuation	711	602	81	69	63	62	296	435	7,574	10,767	26	5	641	381	130	66	168	948	1,798	3,282	1,382	300	200	180	182		
Occupation	N/A	N/A	N/A	Shop & iron dealer	N/A	N/A	N/A	Amirant	Dame	N/A	N/A	N/A	Man	N/A	N/A	Blacksmith	N/A	N/A	N/A	Man	Man	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Administrator	Brother	Man	Mother	Daughter	Woman	Woman	Nephew	Son	Daughter	Son	Man	Woman	Man	Man	Daughter	Son	Brother	Man	Man	Brother	Man	Man	Man	Man	Brother	Brother	
Undergarments	25.23%	29.17%	0.00%	27.59%	58.54%	28.95%	0.00%	50.00%	21.01%	0.00%	30.77%	41.46%	42.86%	26.09%	55.56%	43.48%	61.11%	24.24%	28.85%	45.45%	54.55%	28.21%	0.00%	0.00%	44.44%	41.67%	
Chemise	8	6	0	4	4	0	0	6	6	0	4	6	2	4	6	3	7	0	3	4	14	0	0	0	2	6	89
Drawers	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	3	18	
Stockings	14	3	0	2	12	9	0	7	24	0	3	7	0	6	0	4	0	4	5	4	6	6	0	0	0	0	110
Stay's	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	1	0	0	3	4	2	1	0	1	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	18
Petticoat	4	8	0	2	8	11	0	0	0	5	4	4	4	5	4	2	3	4	6	5	9	3	0	0	2	6	99
Total	27	21	0	8	24	22	0	15	29	0	12	17	6	18	10	10	11	8	15	15	36	11	0	0	4	15	334
Outer Garments	27.10%	26.39%	20.00%	31.03%	29.27%	25.00%	0.00%	16.67%	19.57%	37.50%	17.95%	24.39%	14.29%	20.29%	33.33%	13.04%	22.22%	36.36%	28.85%	21.21%	16.67%	51.28%	66.67%	46.67%	11.11%	41.67%	
Dress/Gown	13	8	1	7	6	12	0	5	25	3	3	5	0	7	3	3	4	6	7	6	7	6	4	1	7	0	142
Boice/Shift	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	
Skirt	6	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	9	26
Night Garment	6	4	0	0	6	7	0	0	2	0	4	0	2	4	3	0	0	2	3	0	4	4	1	0	1	6	59
Night Cap	4	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	27
total	29	19	1	9	12	19	0	5	27	3	7	10	2	14	6	3	4	12	15	7	11	20	2	7	1	15	260
Outdoor Garments	15.89%	13.89%	40.00%	6.90%	12.20%	13.16%	100.00%	6.67%	13.04%	25.00%	7.69%	12.20%	35.71%	10.14%	11.11%	0.00%	11.11%	21.21%	5.77%	9.09%	12.12%	5.13%	33.33%	0.00%	0.00%	5.56%	
Outdoor Garment	7	4	2	0	0	1	2	2	6	2	0	2	4	3	0	0	0	3	1	1	1	2	0	0	0	1	44
Shawl	7	6	0	2	3	9	1	0	0	6	3	3	1	4	2	0	0	0	2	2	7	0	1	0	0	0	65
Scarf	3	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
Total	17	10	2	2	5	10	3	2	16	2	3	5	5	7	2	0	2	7	3	3	8	2	1	0	0	2	121
Accessories	31.78%	30.56%	40.00%	34.48%	0.00%	32.89%	0.00%	26.67%	46.38%	37.50%	43.59%	21.95%	7.14%	43.48%	0.00%	43.48%	5.56%	18.18%	36.54%	24.24%	16.67%	66.67%	0.00%	53.33%	44.44%	11.11%	
Headress	8	5	2	7	0	10	0	5	12	0	9	8	0	5	0	0	0	0	4	3	1	2	0	3	0	0	84
Gloves	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	2	0	0	0	9	
Umbrella	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	
Parasol	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Shoes	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Boots/Galoshes	2	0	0	1	0	4	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	4	6	0	3	0	0	8
Sleeves	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	3	11	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	4	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	31
Collars	9	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	35
Cuffs	2	5	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	10	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	31
Pocket	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10
Handkerchief	3	3	0	2	0	0	0	0	26	0	6	0	0	6	0	4	0	0	0	3	6	10	0	0	0	0	69
Muff	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10
Total	34	22	2	10	0	25	0	8	64	3	17	9	1	30	0	10	1	6	19	8	11	26	0	2	0	4	288
Total	107	72	5	29	41	76	3	30	138	8	39	41	14	69	18	23	18	33	52	33	66	39	3	15	9	36	1037



Appendix 2: Details of 14 Women’s Clothing Inventories, Worth under £500, between 1850 and 1875

Surname	Parry	Green	Flavell	Cockel	Bradly	Limerick	Grout	Sims	Meadows	Scott	Barrett	Lake	Owen	Dunsdon	Total	Average	Percentage
Born-Died	d 1853	1778-1857	1784-1852	1831-1851	d 1864	1779-1860	d 1863	1842-1873	1821-1875	d 1874	1767-1852	d 1869	d 1858	1785-1854			
Age	N/A	79	68	20	N/A	81	N/A	31	54	N/A	85	N/A	N/A	69			
Place	Hereford	Essex	Stafford	Durham	Surrey	Middlesex	Surrey	Surrey	Middlesex	Middlesex	Middlesex	Kent	Middlesex	Wilts			
Marital status	Spinster	Widow	Widow	Spinster	Spinster	Widow	Spinster	Spinster	Spinster	Spinster	Spinster	Spinster	Widow	Widow			
Valuation	62	66	69	81	96	130	168	180	182	200	296	300	381	435			
Occupation	N/A	Blacksmith	Shop & iron keeper	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Annuitant			
Administrator	Woman	Son	Daughter	Mother	Brother	Daughter	Brother	Brother	Brother	Man	Nephew	Man	Man	Son			
Undergarments	29%	43%	28%	0%	45%	55.56%	61.11%	44.44%	41.67%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	26.09%	50.00%			
Chemise	0	3	4	0	4	6	7	2	6	0	0	0	4	6	42	3.00	33%
Drawers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	3	0.21	2%
Stockings	9	4	2	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	7	32	2.29	25%
Stays	2	1	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	11	0.79	9%
Petticoat	11	2	2	0	5	4	3	2	6	0	0	0	0	5	40	2.86	31%
Total	22	10	8	0	15	10	11	4	15	0	0	0	18	15	128	9.14	100%
Outer Garments	25%	13%	31%	20%	21%	33.33%	22.22%	11.11%	41.67%	46.67%	0.00%	66.67%	20.29%	16.67%			
Dress/Gown	12	3	7	1	7	3	4	0	0	7	0	1	7	5	57	4.07	61%
Bodice/Shirt	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	0%
Skirt	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	11	0.79	12%
Night Garment	7	0	0	0	0	3	0	1	6	0	0	1	4	0	22	1.57	24%
Night Cap	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3	0.21	3%
total	19	3	9	1	7	6	4	1	15	7	0	2	14	5	93	6.64	100%
Outdoor Garments	13%	0%	7%	40%	9%	11.11%	11.11%	0.00%	5.56%	0.00%	100.00%	33.33%	10.14%	6.67%			
Outdoor Garment	1	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	3	2	12	0.86	33%
Shawl	9	0	2	0	2	2	2	0	1	0	1	1	4	0	24	1.71	67%
Scarf	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	0%
	10	0	2	2	3	2	2	0	2	0	3	1	7	2	36	2.57	100%
Accessories	33%	43%	34%	40%	24%	0.00%	5.56%	44.44%	11.11%	53.33%	0.00%	0.00%	43.48%	26.67%			
Headress	10	0	7	2	3	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	5	5	35	2.50	32%
Gloves	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0.21	3%
Umbrella	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.07	1%
Parasol	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.07	1%
Shoes	0	6	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	0.50	6%
Boots/Galoshes	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	4	3	0	0	0	0	12	0.86	11%
Sleeves	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	0.21	3%
Collars	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	14	1.00	13%
Cuffs	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	10	0	15	1.07	14%
Pocket	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	0.14	2%
Handkerchief	0	4	2	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	15	1.07	14%
Muff	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	0.14	2%
Total	25	10	10	2	8	0	1	4	4	8	0	0	30	8	110	7.86	100%
Total	76	23	29	5	33	18	18	9	36	15	3	3	69	30	367	26.21	

Appendix 3: Details of 10 Women’s Clothing Inventories, Worth over £500, between 1850 and 1875

Surname	Wilkinson	Gardiner	Short	Wigan	Goulston	Rositer	Edwards	Arnold	Foulls	Stephens	Total	Average	Percentage
Born-Died	d.1850	d.1852	1792-1858	d.1850	d.1862	d.1869	1766-1863	d.1864	1804-1852	d.1855			
Age	N/A	N/A	66	N/A	N/A	N/A	97	N/A	48	N/A			
Place	Middlesex	Middlesex	Surrey	Kent	Surrey	Surrey	Middlesex	Middlesex	Middlesex	Kent			
Marital status	Widow	Spinster	Widow	Spinster	Widow	Widow	Spinster	Widow	Widow	Widow			
Valuation	602	634	641	711	948	1,382	1,798	3,282	7,574	10,767			
Occupation	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Dame	N/A			
Administrator	Man	Woman	Man	Brother	Man	Son	Man	Man	Daughter	Son			
Undergarments	29.17%	58.54%	42.86%	25.23%	24.24%	28.21%	28.85%	54.55%	21.01%	0.00%			
Chemise	6	4	2	8	0	3	14	0	0	0	37	3.7	21%
Drawers	3	0	0	0	0	6	0	6	0	0	15	1.5	8%
Stockings	3	12	0	14	4	0	5	6	24	0	68	6.8	38%
Stays	1	0	0	1	0	2	1	1	0	0	6	0.6	3%
Petticoat	8	8	4	4	4	3	6	9	5	5	51	5.1	29%
Total	21	24	6	27	8	11	15	36	29	0	177	17.7	100%
Outer Garments	26.39%	29.27%	14.29%	27.10%	36.36%	51.28%	28.85%	16.67%	19.57%	37.50%			
Dress/Gown	8	6	0	13	6	4	6	6	25	3	77	7.7	51%
Bodice/Shirt	2	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	6	0.6	4%
Skirt	0	0	0	6	0	3	0	1	0	0	10	1	7%
Night Garment	4	6	2	6	2	4	3	4	2	0	33	3.3	22%
Night Cap	5	0	0	4	3	6	6	0	0	0	24	2.4	16%
total	19	12	2	29	12	20	15	11	27	3	150	15	100%
Outdoor Garments	13.89%	12.20%	35.71%	15.89%	21.21%	5.13%	5.77%	12.12%	13.04%	25.00%			
Outdoor Garment	4	0	4	7	3	2	1	1	6	2	30	3	39%
Shawl	6	3	1	7	3	0	2	7	6	0	35	3.5	45%
Scarf	0	2	0	3	1	0	0	0	6	0	12	1.2	16%
	10	5	5	17	7	2	3	8	18	2	77	7.7	100%
Accessories	30.56%	0.00%	7.14%	31.78%	18.18%	66.67%	36.54%	16.67%	46.38%	37.50%			
Headress	5	0	0	8	0	2	4	1	12	0	32	3.2	17%
Gloves	2	0	0	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	6	0.6	3%
Umbrella	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0.2	1%
Parasol	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	0	4	0.4	2%
Shoes	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0.1	1%
Boots/Galoshes	0	0	0	2	0	6	1	4	0	0	13	1.3	7%
Sleeves	3	0	0	0	4	0	9	0	11	0	27	2.7	15%
Collars	0	0	0	9	0	6	0	0	6	0	21	2.1	11%
Cuffs	5	0	0	2	1	0	2	0	6	0	16	1.6	9%
Pocket	3	0	0	3	0	0	2	0	0	0	8	0.8	4%
Handkerchief	3	0	0	3	0	10	0	6	26	0	48	4.8	26%
Muff	1	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0.8	4%
Total	22	0	1	34	6	26	19	11	64	3	186	18.6	100%
Total	72	41	14	107	33	39	52	66	138	8	570	57	

Appendix 4: Details of 12 Spinsters' Clothing Inventories, between 1850 and 1875

Surname	Wigan d.1850	Cockel 1831-1851	Gardiner d.1852	Parry d.1853	Barrett 1767-1852	Grout d.1863	Edwards 1766-1863	Bradly d.1864	Lake d.1869	Scott d.1874	Sims 1842-1873	Meadows 1821-1875	Total	Average	Percentage
Born-Died	N/A	20	N/A	N/A	85	N/A	97	N/A	N/A	N/A	31	54			
Age	Kent	Durham	Middlesex	Hereford	Middlesex	Surrey	Middlesex	Surrey	Kent	Middlesex	Surrey	Middlesex			
Valuation	711	81	634	62	296	168	1,798	96	300	200	180	182			
Occupation	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A			
Administrator	Brother	Mother	Woman	Woman	Nephew	Brother	Man	Brother	Man	Man	Brother	Brother			
Undergarments															
Chemise	8	0	4	0	0	7	3	4	0	0	2	6	33%	2.83	26%
Drawers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3		0.25	2%
Stockings	14	0	12	9	0	0	5	4	0	0	0	0	44	3.67	33%
Stays	1	0	0	2	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	7	0.58	5%
Petticoat	4	0	8	11	0	3	6	5	0	0	2	6	45	3.75	34%
Total	27	0	24	22	0	11	15	15	0	0	4	15	133	11.08	100%
Outer Garments															
Dress/Gown	13	1	6	12	0	4	6	7	1	7	0	0	28%	4.75	51%
Bodice/Shirt	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		0.00	0%
Skirt	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	15	1.25	13%
Night Garment	6	0	6	7	0	3	0	3	1	0	1	6	30	2.50	27%
Night Cap	4	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	10	0.83	9%
total	29	1	12	19	0	4	15	7	2	7	1	15	112	9.33	100%
Outdoor Garments															
Outdoor Garment	7	2	0	1	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	12%	1.25	31%
Shawl	7	0	3	9	1	2	2	2	1	0	0	1	28	2.33	58%
Scarf	3	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0.42	10%
	17	2	5	10	3	2	3	3	1	0	0	2	48	4.00	100%
Accessories															
Headress	8	2	0	10	0	0	4	3	0	3	0	0	26%	2.50	29%
Gloves	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	5	0.42	5%
Umbrella	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0.17	2%
Parasol	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0.17	2%
Shoes	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	0.17	2%
Boots/Galoshes	2	0	0	4	0	0	1	0	0	3	0	4	14	1.17	13%
Sleeves	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	9	0.75	9%
Collars	9	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	1.33	15%
Cuffs	2	0	0	3	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	9	0.75	9%
Pocket	3	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	5	0.42	5%
Handkerchief	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	6	6	0.50	6%
Muff	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	5	0.42	5%
Total	34	2	0	25	0	1	19	8	0	8	4	4	105	8.75	100%
Total	107	5	41	76	3	18	52	33	3	15	9	36	398	33.17	

Appendix 5: Details of 13 Widows' Clothing Inventories, between 1850 and 1875

Surname	Wilkinson	Flavell	Dunsdon	Foulis	Stephens	Hartley	Short	Owen	Limerick	Green	Goulston	Arnold	Roster	Total	Average	Percentage
Born-Died	d. 1850	1784-1852	1785-1854	1804-1852	d. 1855	1792-1857	1792-1858	d.1858	1779-1860	1778-1857	d.1862	d.1864	d. 1869			
Age	N/A	68	69	48	N/A	65	66	N/A	81	79	N/A	N/A	N/A			
Place	Middlesex	Stafford	Wills	Middlesex	Kent	Ilammingham	Surrey	Middlesex	Middlesex	Essex	Surrey	Middlesex	Surrey			
Valuation	602	69	435	7 574	10 767	26	641	381	130	66	948	3 282	1 382			
Occupation	N/A		Annuitant	Dame	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Blacksmith	N/A	N/A	N/A			
Administrator	Man	Daughter	Son	Daughter	Son	Man	Man	Man	Daughter	Son	Man	Man	Son			
Undergarments																
Chemise	6	4	6	0	0	4	2	4	6	3	0	14	0	32%	3.77	27%
Drawers	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	6	49	1.15	8%
Stockings	3	2	7	24	0	3	0	6	0	4	4	6	0	15	4.54	32%
Stays	1	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	3	0	1	0	1	2	11	6%
Petticoat	8	2	0	5	0	4	4	5	4	2	4	9	3	50	3.85	27%
Total	21	8	15	29	0	12	6	18	10	10	8	36	11	184	14.15	100%
Outer Garments																
Dress/Gown	8	7	5	25	3	3	0	7	3	3	6	6	4	24%	6.15	58%
Bodice/Shirt	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	3	6	0.46	4%
Skirt	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	6	0.46	4%
Night Garment	4	0	0	2	0	4	2	4	3	0	2	4	29	2.23	21%	
Night Cap	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	3	0	6	17	1.31	12%
total	19	9	5	27	3	7	2	14	6	3	12	11	20	138	10.62	100%
Outdoor Garments																
Outdoor Garment	4	0	2	6	2	0	4	3	0	0	3	1	2	12%	2.08	40%
Shawl	6	2	0	6	0	3	1	4	2	0	3	7	0	27	2.62	50%
Scarf	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	7	0.54	10%
	10	2	2	18	2	3	5	7	2	0	7	8	2	68	5.23	100%
Accessories																
Headress	5	7	5	12	0	9	0	5	0	0	0	1	2	36%	3.54	22%
Gloves	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	4	0.31	2%
Umbrella	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0.08	0%
Parasol	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0.23	1%
Shoes	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	6	0.46	3%
Boots/Galoshes	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	4	6	13	1.00	6%
Sleeves	3	0	3	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	21	1.62	10%
Collars	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	0	6	19	1.46	9%
Cuffs	5	0	0	6	0	0	0	10	0	0	1	0	0	22	1.69	11%
Pocket	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	5	0.38	2%
Handkerchief	3	2	0	26	0	6	0	6	0	4	0	6	10	63	4.85	30%
Muff	1	0	0	0	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0.38	2%
Total	22	10	8	64	3	17	1	30	0	10	6	11	26	208	16.00	100%
Total	72	29	30	138	8	39	14	69	18	23	33	66	39	578	44.46	



Appendix 6: Details of Clothing Inventories of 19 Women That Died in Kent, Middlesex, and Surrey, between 1850 and 1875

Surname	Wigan	Stephens	Late	Total	Average	Percentage	Wilkinson	Gardiner	Barrett	Faulis	Owen	Linerick	Edwards	Arnold	Scott	Meadows	Total	Average	Percentage	Short	Groat	Goulston	Bradly	Roster	Sims	Total	Average	Percentage
Born-Died	d 1850	d 1855	d 1859				d 1850	d 1852	1767-1852	1804-1852	d 1858	1775-1860	1766-1863	d 1864	d 1874	1821-1875				1792-1858	d 1863	d 1862	d 1864	d 1869	1842-1873			
Age	N/A	N/A	N/A				N/A	N/A	65	48	N/A	81	97	N/A	N/A	54				66	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	31			
Place	Kent	Kent	Kent				Middlesex	Middlesex	Middlesex	Middlesex	Middlesex	Middlesex	Middlesex	Middlesex	Middlesex	Middlesex				Surrey	Surrey	Surrey	Surrey	Surrey	Surrey			
Manus	711	10,767	300				602	634	296	7,574	381	130	1,798	3,282	200	182				641	168	948	96	1,382	180			
Valuation	N/A	N/A	N/A				N/A	N/A	N/A	Dame	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A				N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A			
Occupation	Brother	Son	Man				Man	Woman	Nephew	Daughter	Man	Daughter	Man	Man	Man	Brother				Man	Brother	Man	Brother	Son	Brother			
Administrator																												
Undergarments																												
Chemise	8	0	0	8	2.67	30%	6	4	0	0	4	6	3	14	0	6	43	4.30	26%	2	7	0	4	0	2	15	2.50	27%
Drawers	0	0	0	0	0.00	0%	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	3	12	1.20	7%	0	0	0	0	6	0	6	1.00	11%
Stockings	14	0	0	14	4.67	52%	3	12	0	24	6	0	5	6	0	0	56	5.60	33%	0	0	4	4	0	0	8	1.33	15%
Stays	1	0	0	1	0.33	4%	1	0	0	0	3	0	1	1	0	0	6	0.60	4%	0	1	0	2	2	0	5	0.83	9%
Petticoat	4	0	0	4	1.33	15%	8	8	0	5	5	4	6	9	0	6	51	5.10	30%	4	3	4	5	3	2	21	3.50	38%
Total	27	0	0	27	9.00	100%	21	24	0	29	18	10	15	36	0	15	168	16.80	100%	6	11	8	15	11	4	55	9.17	100%
Outer Garments																												
Dress/Gown	13	3	1	17	5.67	50%	8	6	0	25	7	3	6	6	7	0	68	6.80	54%	0	4	6	7	4	0	21	3.50	46%
Bodice/Shirt	0	0	0	0	0.00	0%	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0.20	2%	0	0	0	1	0	3	0	0.67	9%
Shirt	6	0	0	6	2.00	18%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	1.00	8%	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0.50	7%	
Night Garment	6	0	1	7	2.33	21%	4	6	0	2	4	3	4	3	4	0	6	3.20	25%	2	0	2	0	4	1	9	1.50	20%
Night Cap	4	0	0	4	1.33	12%	5	0	0	0	3	0	6	0	0	0	14	1.40	11%	0	0	0	3	6	0	9	1.50	20%
Total	29	3	2	34	11.33	100%	19	12	0	27	14	6	15	11	7	15	126	12.60	100%	2	4	12	7	20	1	46	7.67	100%
Outdoor Garments																												
Outdoor Garment	7	2	0	9	3.00	45%	4	0	2	6	3	0	1	1	0	1	18	1.80	31%	4	0	3	1	2	0	10	1.67	53%
Shawl	7	0	1	8	2.67	40%	6	3	1	6	4	2	2	7	0	0	32	3.20	55%	1	2	3	2	0	0	8	1.33	42%
Scarf	3	0	0	3	1.00	15%	0	2	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0.80	14%	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0.17	5%
Total	17	2	1	20	6.67	100%	10	5	3	18	7	2	3	8	0	2	58	5.80	100%	5	2	7	3	2	0	19	3.17	100%
Accessories																												
Headress	8	0	0	8	2.67	22%	5	0	0	12	5	0	4	1	3	0	30	3.00	19%	0	0	0	3	2	0	5	0.83	11%
Gloves	1	0	0	1	0.33	3%	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	3	0.30	2%	0	0	0	2	0	4	0.67	9%	
Umbrella	1	0	0	1	0.33	3%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	0%	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.33	4%	
Parasol	1	0	0	1	0.33	3%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0.30	2%	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.17	2%	
Shoes	1	0	0	1	0.33	3%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00	0%	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0.17	2%
Boots/Galoshes	2	0	0	2	0.67	5%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	3	4	12	1.20	8%	0	0	0	0	0	6	1.00	13%
Sleeves	0	0	0	0	0.00	0%	3	0	0	11	0	0	9	0	0	0	23	2.30	15%	0	0	4	0	0	0	4	0.67	9%
Collars	9	0	0	9	3.00	24%	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	13	1.30	8%	0	0	0	0	6	0	6	1.00	13%
Cuffs	2	0	0	2	0.67	5%	5	0	2	6	10	0	2	0	0	0	23	2.30	15%	0	0	1	0	0	2	3	0.50	7%
Pocket	3	0	0	3	1.00	8%	3	0	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	7	0.70	4%	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0.00	0%
Handkerchief	3	0	0	3	1.00	8%	3	0	0	0	26	6	0	0	0	0	41	4.10	26%	0	0	0	3	10	0	13	2.17	28%
Muff	3	3	0	6	2.00	16%	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	3	0.30	2%	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.17	2%
Total	34	3	0	37	12.33	100%	22	0	0	64	30	0	19	11	8	4	158	15.80	100%	1	1	6	8	26	4	46	7.67	100%
Total	107	8	3	118	39.33		72	41	3	138	69	18	52	66	15	36	510	51.00		14	18	33	33	39	9	146	24.33	

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Biographical details for the above: William Clarke, corn factor and grocer, Sarah Clarke, milliner, and John Clarke, tailor, all of the High Street, Godalming, are named in Pigot's Directory of Surrey for 1840. Miss Clarke, the dressmaker of 1873-83, does not appear in Directories, but some of her customers do, including Mrs Graymark, shopkeeper and beer retailer of Meadow.

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